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# Sea Swallow

*published by the* **Royal Naval Birdwatching Society**

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**Editor:**
David Dobson,
Downgate Cottage, Steep Marsh,
Petersfield, Hants GU32 2BE.
**Phone:** 01730 261344
**Email:** editor@rnbws.org.uk

**Secretary:**
Steve Copsey
20 Shepards Close, Fareham,
Hants PO14 3AJ.
**Phone:** 01329 319213
**Email:** secretary@rnbws.org.uk

**Hon. Treasurer:**
Tony Tindale,
12 Longfield Avenue,
Fareham, Hants PO14 1DA.
**Email:** treasurer@rnbws.org.uk

**Seabird Records Coordinator:**
Stephen Chapman,
Steeplefield, Marlpost Road,
Southwater, Horsham RH13 7BZ.
**Phone:** 07973 533968
**Email:** data@rnbws.org.uk

**Front Cover:**
Razorbill, Isle of May
© *Harry Scott*

**Designed and typeset by:**
Harry Scott (Pica Design)
51 Charlton Crescent, Aboyne,
Aberdeenshire AB34 5GN.
**Email:** picades@ifb.co.uk

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**Patron:** His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, KG, KT, OM, GBE
**President:** Vice Admiral Sir David Dobson KBE
**Vice President:** The Master, the Honourable Company of Master Mariners

**Executive Committee:**
Chairman. Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster CBE.
**Email:** chairman@rnbws.org.uk

Vice Chairman & Seabird Records Coordinator: Captain Stephen Chapman MN.
**Email:** data@rnbws.org.uk

Secretary & Librarian: Warrant Officer Steve Copsey.
**Email:** secretary@rnbws.org.uk

Hon. Treasurer and Membership Secretary: Warrant Officer Tony Tindale.
**Email:** treasurer@rnbws.org.uk

Expeditions & Field Trips Coordinator and Webmaster: CPO Mark Cutts.
**Email:** expeditions@rnbws.org.uk and webmaster@rnbws.org.uk

Lieutenant Steve Jones.
**Email:** madfishjones@hotmail.com

Lieutenant Philip Boak.
**Email:** swordfish200@aol.com

**Web site:** *www.rnbws.org.uk*

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The Society was formed in 1946 to provide a forum for the exchange of information on seabirds, and land birds at sea, by members for whom birdwatching is a spare time recreation and hobby. It also aims to coordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist. In addition to the promotion of observations afloat, the RNBWS organises fieldwork and expeditions, often in cooperation with the Army and RAF Ornithological Societies.

The Royal Naval Birdwatching Society is the only organisation in the world which collects, collates and publishes data on seabirds and landbirds at sea. Membership is open to all those, regardless of nationality, who share a common interest in birds at sea. Instructions for joining can be found on the Society website www.rnbws.org.uk or by application to the Secretary.

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**RNBWS Record Forms:** These can be found on the website. Completed forms should be sent to the Seabird Records Coordinator (address at left).

**Material for publication** in *Sea Swallow* should be sent to the editor. Ideally submissions should be in MS Word or rtf format, but other formats are acceptable. Graphics should be jpeg or tiff. Accompanying photographs sent electronically should always be the original camera files, and not cropped in any way. Contributions are welcome at any time, but if for inclusion in the next edition should reach the editor by 30 July.

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# Chairman's Foreword

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

I see the Chairman's Foreword as partly an annual report on the health of the Society, and partly an introduction to the contents of the magazine.

On the former, I believe that the Society's finances are sound, but we need to be careful not to spend beyond our means and erode the legacy left us by Captain David Simpson. So, a bit of tightening up here and there.

On the fieldwork side there is plenty of activity to report, with society get togethers in Gibraltar and Portland (and it was especially good to have Colonel Peter Smith in the Gib group). A two-man team went out to Madeira in July to continue the work of supporting Frank Zino in his conservation work, and Harry Scott, *Sea Swallow* designer and RNBWS member, led an RNBWS team to assist with bird monitoring work on the Isle of May (both projects are reported on within).

I have left what is probably the most important, but unheralded, activity until last. Stephen Chapman has done an enormous amount of work correcting errors in our database of seabird records, and he now feels that it is a thoroughly reliable resource, ready to be shared. Our plan now is to join up with the BTO and other UK bodies so that our data is more readily available, and though our database of records is small compared with others it is especially valuable because over the years RN ships and RFAs have operated in areas rarely frequented by commercial shipping.

Now to this year's *Sea Swallow*. It is the usual global mixture, ranging from New Zealand to the Isthmus of Panama, via the Indian Ocean and the Antarctic, plus several home-based articles. I particularly like the Antarctic cruise article by Commander Tony Norris, who is a skilled observer with a geographer's eye for the broader picture, and I commend too Simon Cook's article on a fall of landbirds off Panama. Here's a taster: "One very tired Yellow-billed Cuckoo was seen at 0631. I tried to catch it but it flew off. Later it alighted on a balcony and I tried again to catch it but it dropped down onto the sea. I then ran to the gangway, jumped into a Zodiac, and rescued the bird, which was safely released in car park ashore next day." That's Simon Cook for you.

That said, however, the article that has the most importance for me, because it comes from an HM ship on operations, is also at just 200 words by far the shortest in the magazine. *HMS Echo*, a modern survey ship, has spent most of 2017 on operations off the Libyan coast, engaged not in surveying but in dealing with the traffic of African immigrants to Europe. The article is deliberately and necessarily very sparse on detail about the operation - not a very satisfying task I suspect - but I commend the ship's Navigating Officer, Lieutenant Boak, for his observations.

***Martin Alabaster***
*Email: chairman@rnbws.org.uk*

**Plate 1.** Four Greater-crested Tern chicks unable to fly at water edge of the new emerged sandbank, facing Ile aux Goëlettes, April 2017. © *Aurélie Duhec*

# Breeding seabirds of Farquhar Atoll, Seychelles including the return of two species: Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* and Greater-crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*

by A Duhec, R Jeanne & A Skerrett

## Introduction

Farquhar Atoll is situated 770 km south-southwest of Mahé (the main island of Seychelles) and 270 km northeast of Madagascar. It is a low-lying flat, roughly circular atoll of ten islands surrounding a shallow lagoon, which dries extensively at low tide (Figure 1). Beyond Farquhar Atoll, the nearest islands are Saint-Pierre and Providence Atoll, both situated to the north. Together these islands make up the Farquhar Group, one of the four main island groups of Seychelles, three of which are collectively known as the Seychelles outer islands (Figure 2).

Farquhar was discovered in 1504 and named in honour of Portuguese navigator Joao de Nova. The first chart was produced by French hydrographer Margaro in 1776. The atoll was renamed in 1824, in honour of Sir Robert Townsend Farquhar, Governor of Mauritius 1810–1823. In 1813, Governor Farquhar awarded the lease of Farquhar to Monsieur Boudet, a resident of Mauritius, probably the first proprietor of the atoll. He and subsequent proprietors made money from produce including coconuts, dried fish, maize and guano. There is no information available on the state of the island ecosystem before human settlement. However, the presence of substantial seabird colonies on the main islands is attested by the presence of guano and phosphatic rocks (Baker 1963). The decline of seabird populations doubtless commenced soon after human settlement.

The first published observations from Farqhuar were those of Fairfax Moresby in March 1822, but these were limited to the concerns of the day, being mainly fixing the position of little known islands, shoals and anchorages (Moresby 1842). The first published observations of seabirds were by Robert Farquhar's namesake, Commander Stuart Farquhar in 1897 (Farquhar 1900). Little else was recorded concerning flora and fauna until the Percy Sladen Expedition in 1905, when Stanley Gardiner worked mainly on the seaward reef of Ile du Nord while entomologist Bainbrigge Fletcher worked on Ile du Sud, but no significant observations of breeding seabirds were made at this time (Gardiner and Cooper 1907). Vesey-Fitzgerald made observations of seabirds in 1937 (Vesey-Fitzgerald 1941). Stoddart and Poore summarised early information collected on birds (Stoddart and Poore 1970).

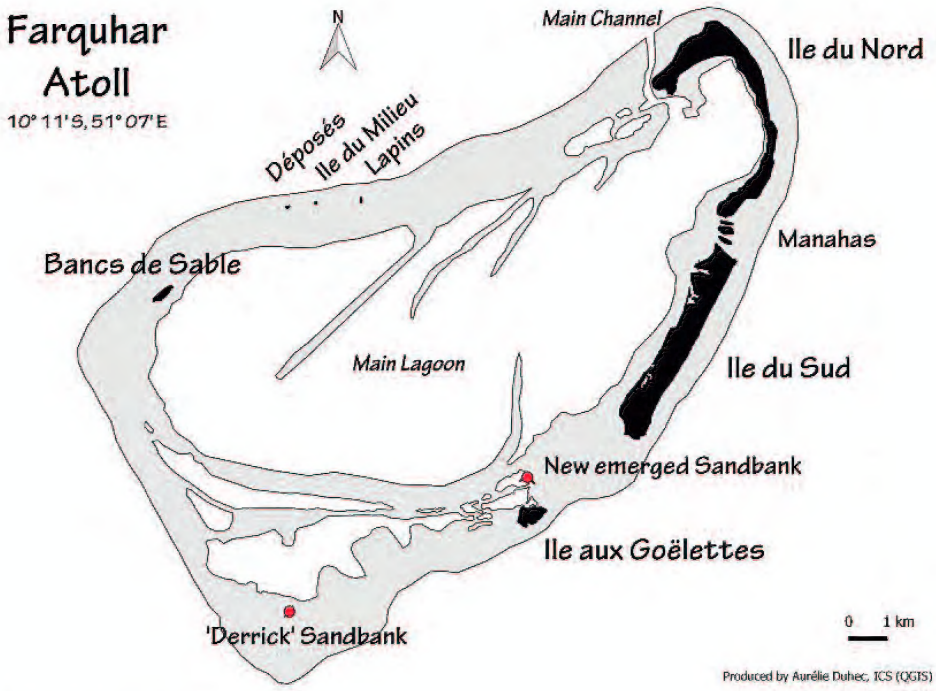


**Figure 1.** Map of Farquhar.

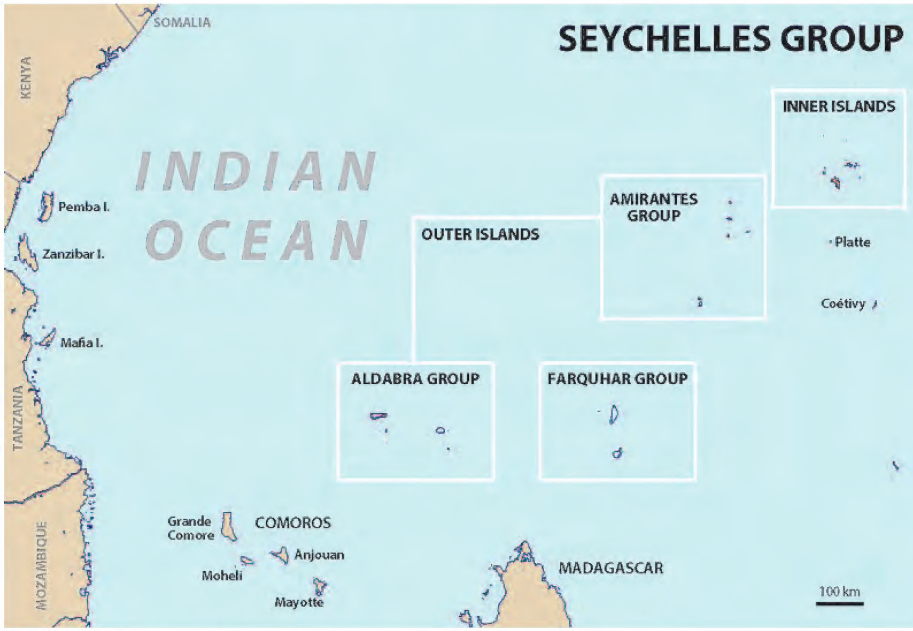


**Figure 2.** Map of Seychelles including the Farquhar Group (from Skerrett and Disley 2011).

The lease of Farquhar was passed to the Mahé Assets Company in 1924, to Dr. Lanier in 1936 and to Paul Moulinie in 1951. In 1965, Farquhar became a part of British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). Upon independence in 1976, Farquhar was returned to Seychelles by BIOT for the nominal fee of 30 rupees.

In September 2014, the Island Conservation Society (ICS) established a Conservation Centre at Farquhar, with Aurelié Duhec (AD) as Conservation Officer and Richard Jeanne (RJ) as Assistant Conservation Officer. This was made possible thanks to financial support for an initial period of five years under the Outer Islands Project (OIP), a project funded by the Government of Seychelles (GOS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Global Environment Fund (GEF) with the assistance of the Islands Development Company (IDC), managers of Farquhar Atoll.

The OIP project will lead to the creation of terrestrial and marine protected areas on Farquhar, Alphonse Group, Desroches, and Poivre. On Farquhar Atoll, the protected lands will consist of Ile du Sud (National Park, IUCN Category II), Ile aux Goëlettes and Bancs de Sable (Strict Nature Reserves, IUCN Category I). The OIP identifies seabirds as an important component of the outer island ecosystems and an important feature of the proposed protected areas (PIMS 4529 Seychelles Outer Islands 2013).

## Farquar as an IBA

Five of the smaller islets of Farquhar Atoll are collectively recognized by BirdLife International as an Important Bird Area (IBA). There are twenty IBAs in Seychelles as a whole. Most of the eleven IBAs of the inner islands are recognised due to the presence of endemic land birds. However, in seven of the nine IBAs in the outer islands, IBA status rests entirely upon the importance of seabird populations. Farquhar qualifies as

an IBA under Category A4i (a site containing 1% or more of the African region population of a congregatory waterbird species, the definition including seabirds). Three seabird populations within the existing boundaries of the Islets of Farquhar IBA exceed A4 thresholds: Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* and Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*. Farquhar also qualifies under Category A4iii (a site that holds more than 20,000 waterbirds of all species). Excluded from the IBA are the two largest islands, Ile du Nord and Ile du Sud, together with three smaller intervening islands known as the Manahas (Skerrett and Rocamora 2001).

The islands within the Islets of Farquhar IBA that have the greatest ornithological interest are Ile aux Goëlettes and Bancs de Sable. Ile aux Goëlettes is the most southerly point of land in Seychelles and hosts five of the atoll's eight breeding seabird species: Sooty Tern, Brown Noddy, Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris*, Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* and Black-naped Tern. Bancs de Sable is the youngest of the 155 islands named in the Constitution of Seychelles, first noted only in the 1950s when residents reported a new small sandbank with two or three shrubs (Skerrett 2006a and 2006b). By 1963 it was a small island of no more than 30 square metres at high tide with a few very low *Scaevola sericea* and one very small coconut tree (G Gendron pers comm.). Today it measures approximately 10.6 ha (AD and RJ pers comm). A colony of Black-naped Terns breeds here.

The final three seabird species breeding at Farquhar are Fairy Tern *Gygis alba* breeding throughout the atoll (excluding Ile aux Goëlettes), Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* and the recently rediscovered Greater-crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*. These two last species are discussed in detail below.

## Historical confusion on the status of the Greater-crested Tern

In 1937, Vesey-Fitzgerald recorded that Greater-crested were 'seen around most of the islands'. However, in the whole of Seychelles he only observed breeding activity at African Banks and he made no specific mention of Farquhar at all (Vesey-Fitzgerald 1941). In 1970, Stoddart and Poore summarised ornithological observations at Farquhar, stating that Parker observed the presence of Greater-crested Tern at Farquhar in 1967 but curiously, Parker himself omits the species from his own list of seabird observations from this same time and published in the same journal (Stoddart and Poore 1970, Parker 1970).

Stoddart and Poore overlooked any mention of the observations of Cdr Farquhar in 1897. These are important, but somewhat incongruously Cdr Farquhar reported Royal Tern *Sterna maxima* breeding at Ile aux Goëlettes (Farquhar 1900). For the purposes of publication, the Editor of *Ibis* changed the published reference to "Great Sea-Tern (*S. bernsteini* [?])" noting correctly that *S. maxima* is unlikely as it is mainly an American species. However, the Editor's choice is equally unlikely as Chinese Crested Tern *Thalasseus bernsteini* (formerly *S. bernsteini*) is a Critically Endangered species, previously thought extinct until four pairs were discovered in 2000 on an islet in the Matsu Islands (Taiwan); it formerly had a wider range off the Chinese east coast but it is unknown in the Indian Ocean. The Editor of *Ibis* further speculated in a footnote that "*S. bergii*" (Greater-crested Tern) was a possibility (Farquhar 1900). This speculation is almost certainly correct, and if so it is the earliest record of Greater-crested Tern breeding at Farquhar.

The absence of any records after 1867 suggests Greater-crested Tern probably disappeared as a breeding species at Farquhar at an unknown date. It was observed

present on most islands in significant numbers 1959–1963 but no nesting activity was noted during this period (G Gendron pers comm). Ornithological observations from Farquhar were published relating to 1937, 1967, 1976, 1996, 2005, 2006 and 2011, (Vesey-Fitzgerald 1941, Stoddart and Poore, 1970, Parker 1970, Feare 1976; Skerrett 1996; Skerrett 2006a, Skerrett and Rocamora 2007; Nahaboo 2011) but none recorded breeding activity of Greater-crested Tern, only the presence of non-breeding birds. However, interviews with former residents supported by photographic evidence reveal that the species certainly bred at Farquhar in 2001 and probably most years up to 2011.

AD and RJ interviewed IDC Staff once resident at Farquhar. In an interview with George Marie, IDC Island Manager on Farquhar 1999–2004, he said that Greater-crested Tern was breeding in 'good numbers' at Bancs de Sable in 2001 (confirmed by a photograph of two chicks). In a further interview, Elvis Stravens, IDC Island Manager 2004–2011, confirmed breeding activity during this period but was unable to confirm if this was an annual event. All observations were made on Bancs de Sable. This paper is the first published account of Greater-crested Tern to confirm breeding at Farquhar and it increases the number of nesting seabirds from seven to eight.

## Cyclone Fantala and the return of the Greater-crested Tern

In April 2016, Cyclone Fantala, the most powerful cyclone ever recorded in the western Indian Ocean, struck Farquhar Atoll. Almost all infrastructure except the cyclone shelter and over 90% of coconut trees were destroyed. Storm surge and overwash of sand and coral rubble brought coastal accretion to parts of Ile aux Goëlettes, while the southern coast of Ile du Sud was degraded. Sandy material and rubble were transported to the sandy reef flat between Ile du Sud and Ile aux Goëlettes. This new input of sand raised an existing tidal sandbank above spring high tide to produce a new island, first observed by Steve Vandayne in May 2016. This bank had been progressively growing since about 2013 (Garry Azemia pers comm) but was covered at high tide previous to Cyclone Fantala.

On 18 April 2017, AD and RJ landed on the new sandbanks to record their contours and area. The aggressive territorial behaviour of a few Greater-crested Terns alerted them to possible breeding activity. Among a roosting colony of 100 adults and 4 juveniles they saw four chicks unable to fly. Chicks were well feathered but with down remaining on their foreheads (Plate 1). A fifth chick was observed that had recently fledged judging by to its weak attempts at flight.

Given that incubation is 25–30 days and chicks fledge after 38–40 days, it is estimated that the laying event occurred in the beginning of February. This laying period coincides with the period observed at Bancs Providence (Skerrett 2016a). It is possible that the Farquhar nesting population was a little larger than five pairs and the chicks observed might be the last of the breeding season. However, the limited surface available, 4,070m$^2$ at high tide, suggests a small colony. The ICS team has suggested the newly emerged sandbank should be named Ban Golan Sardin (Creole for 'Greater-crested Tern Bank').

Prior to this observation and since their arrival at Farquhar in September 2014, AD and RJ had only observed non-breeding adult and fledged juvenile Greater-crested Terns, with a maximum count of 131 birds in May 2015. Their favourite roosting sites were Bancs de Sable and a tidal sandbank in the extreme south of the atoll in an area named 'Derrick' by the IDC fishermen (Duhec 2015b). This sandbank formed

**Plate 2.** The Greater-crested Tern colony roosting on the new emerged sandbank, May 2017. © *Richard Jeanne*

around 2011–12 (Garry Azemia pers comm). It was named by IDC fishermen because the location is marked by the crane of a shipwreck visible above the surface, the superstructure of the vessel lying in waters up to about 8 metres in depth. It has been regularly monitored by AD and RJ. It changed in shape following Cyclone Fantala but did not receive sufficient sand deposits to remain emerged at high tide, unlike the new breeding site.

A leucistic juvenile, recognisable from its distinctive plumage, was observed with adults in October 2014 and again in February 2015 (Duhec 2015a) which suggests birds regularly travel from another breeding island, most likely Bancs Providence, only 60 km north of Farquhar.

Elsewhere, the largest known colony of Greater-crested Tern in Seychelles with a minimum of 250 pairs was discovered at Bancs Providence only in 2016 (Skerrett 2016a). Breeding has also been recorded at Aldabra (Diamond and Prŷs-Jones 1986), Etoile (Islands Development Company archive, photographer unknown, in Skerrett 2016a), African Banks (Vesey-Fitzgerald 1941; Feare 1979). The current status at Etoile and African Banks is uncertain because of a lack of recent observations; breeding may also occur at Astove and Cosmoledo but these are not confirmed (Skerrett 2016a).

Greater-crested Tern is vulnerable to disturbance. At Aldabra, colonies have even abandoned small chicks and eggs when scientists have attempted to study the birds while exercising some (but evidently not sufficient) caution (Diamond and Prŷs-Jones 1986). Natural predators too take their toll at tern colonies and in 2015 at Bancs de Sable AD and RJ recorded the desertion of the nesting site by Black-naped Terns due to evident predation by Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea* (Duhec and Jeanne 2016). The species was monitored through three nesting seasons (Nahaboo, 2011; Duhec,

2016) and was found to have shifted location. While the birds were mainly originally recorded nesting on open beach platforms clear of vegetation, in 2015 a breeding attempt occurred inland surrounded by coastal shrubs, which is an atypical habitat. It is possible that Greater-crested Tern abandoned Bancs de Sable some years ago because of human disturbance and Grey Heron predation. They may have moved to Bancs Providence, the closest nesting site from Farquhar. Bancs Providence is rarely visited by humans although it has a very large Grey Heron population.

## The decline and rise of Booby populations

In July 1897, three species of booby bred at Farquhar. Large numbers of Red-footed Booby nested in shrubs and trees on Ile du Nord and Ile du Sud, while Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* and Brown Booby *S. leucogaster* both nested on the ground at Ile aux Goëlettes (Farquhar 1900).

## Extinction of Masked Booby and Brown Booby

At the time of the next ornithological visit in September/October 1937, Masked Booby survived as a breeding species at Ile aux Goëlettes but no Brown Booby were reported (Vesey-Fitzgerald 1941). By 1959 there were no boobies breeding at Ile aux Goëlettes. However, both species were known by residents of Farquhar to breed at Ile du Milieu, Lapins and Déposés during 1959–1963 (G Gendron pers comm). During this period it was known that workers would take birds for food, but the lessee, Paul Moulinie, protected the colony by imposing a fine of 20 rupees should any bird be killed (G Gendron pers comm). The basic wage of the day was 150 rupees per week.

In October 1976 Feare was informed by residents of Farquhar that Masked Booby still nested at Ile aux Goëlettes but were taken by residents for food. He found no evidence to support this, such as nests or guano encrusted nesting areas, but found four nests of Brown Booby at Lapins and noted birds flying over Ile du Milieu and Déposés (Feare 1978). That same year, the UK Government passed sovereignty of Farquhar from BIOT to the Government of Seychelles. No protection was given to any breeding seabirds then and Brown Booby disappeared as a breeding species some time thereafter. The species has been rarely sighted at Farquhar, but two recent sightings in June and July 2017 and the recent recolonisation of Boudeuse (480 km NNE of Farquhar) give hope for their potential return (Rocamora 2014, Skerrett 2016b).

**Plate 3.** Nesting Red-footed Booby in the southern Barachois dominated by *Pemphis acidula*. View from the high non active dunes at Ile du Sud, May 2017. © *Aurélie Duhec*

In summary, Brown Booby was known to breed at Ile aux Goëlettes in 1897, but subsequently disappeared. Brown Booby bred at Ile du Milieu, Lapins and Déposés until at least 1963, continuing at Lapins until at least 1976. Masked Booby bred at Ile aux Goëlettes until at least 1937 and at Ile du Milieu, Lapins and Déposés until at least 1963. Extinctions were almost certainly due to birds being taken for food.

## The near extinction and dramatic revival of Red-footed Booby

There are no breeding records of Red-footed Booby on Ile du Nord after 1897, their extinction due doubtless to the fact this island has long been the centre of human settlement and coconut plantation. Ile du Sud also suffered considerable losses but small numbers continued to nest high in Casuarina trees (Travis 1959; Stoddart and Poore 1970). In October 1976 44 nests were recorded and the colony was suspected to be larger from the evidence of guano stained trees (Feare 1978). However, in 1996 the colony apparently suffered still further decline to just six pairs, also high in Casuarinas (Skerrett 1996). Subsequent visits suggested a steady increase in numbers though no full survey was conducted until the arrival of ICS staff in 2014. In 2015, up to 4,200 pairs were recorded (Duhec and Jeanne 2015b) during the peak of breeding activity.

At first sight, the devastation wrought by Cyclone Fantala appeared to be a setback for the colony (Plates 3 and 4). The cyclone struck at the height of the breeding season when there were many birds with nests containing eggs or chicks. All nests were destroyed together with virtually all Casuarina trees where birds nested. However, despite the write-off of that season, adults appeared to have survived well and returned in the highest ever recorded numbers, adapting well to the lower available nesting sites. AD and RJ estimated the population at 8,776 (+/- 1,221) pairs in 2017. This is well beyond the A4ii IBA threshold of 10,000 individuals.

This spectacular increase in Red-footed Booby numbers, first documented during the 2015 breeding census, suggests a very high breeding success, and in addition the presence of white-tailed brown morph that do not breed anywhere else in Seychelles (2% of the population in 2015) (Plate 5) suggests an influx of birds from other roockeries most probably attracted by the abundance of prey around Farquhar (Duhec and Jeanne 2015b). Le Corre concluded that Indian Ocean populations are genetically isolated from each other (Le Corre 1999). White-tailed brown morph breeds elsewhere in the region at Tromelin and Europa. Tromelin lies 720 km southeast of Farquhar, considerably closer than Europa, which is about 1,800 km via the shortest sea route roughly southwest of Farquhar. This suggests Tromelin might be the most likely source of white-tailed brown morph colonisers. On the other hand, the Tromelin colony is very small, with just 130–180 pairs of which only one third are white-tailed brown morph whereas the Europa colony is considerably larger at 2,800–3,800 pairs of which 98.5% are this morph (Le Corre 1999).

AD and RJ have found the ecosystem of Farquhar to be remarkably interesting. During 2015, when the Indian Ocean Dipole and El Niño coincided, record high sea surface temperatures over the Indian Ocean led to low breeding success of seabirds throughout Seychelles except at Farquhar, where there was no apparent food shortage. The rich waters of Farquhar are probably due to a combination of factors including numerous underwater canyons and the existence of nearby seamounts which contribute to eddies and upwelling of highly productive waters, and all these oceanographic phenomena are enhanced by the passage of the west-flowing South Equatorial Current (Duhec and Mortimer 2017).

**Plate 4.** Red-footed Boobies nesting in *Pemphis acidula*. This shrub became the favourite nesting habitat of the species after the destruction of Casuarina trees by Cyclone Fantala, May 2017. © *Aurélie Duhec*

**Plate 5.** A white-tailed brown morph with a downy chick nesting in a Casuarina tree, the favourite habitat of the seabird species before the cyclone Fantala, October 2014. © *Richard Jeanne*

## Other Seabirds

On 10 July 1897 Cdr Stuart Farquhar reported a colony of Roseate Terns *Sterna dougallii*, some with one, two or even three eggs and a few with chicks (Farquhar 1900). Later visits by ornithologists were rare or non-existent outside the relatively short breeding season of this species but more than a century after Cdr Farquhar's visit on 25 June 1999, Roseate Terns were reported again with 50 birds present (Skerrett 1999). Breeding was confirmed in 2005 (Skerrett and Rocamora 2007). The colony remains small and fragile, estimated at 67 pairs in 2015 (Duhec and Jeanne 2015a).

Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana* bred at Ile aux Goëlettes in 1937 (Vesey-Fitzgerald 1941). It was confirmed as a breeding species at Farquhar on 25 February 2006 when 14 nests with eggs were discovered at Bancs de Sable (Skerrett 2006b). The species was subsequently found also to continue to breed at Ile aux Goëlettes and the atoll-wide population was estimated at 87–137 pairs (Duhec and Jeanne 2016). This is by far the largest population in Seychelles, which hosts all known colonies in the African region with an estimated total population of 245–345 pairs (Skerrett 2016a).

In terms of numbers, the most common seabird at Farquhar is Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus,* estimated at 280,600 pairs (+/- 21,169 pairs) in 2017, followed by Brown Noddy with about 19,139, (+/- 2649 pairs) in 2017. Both results are similar to the 2015 census figures. Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* is a recent colonizer, first recorded in 2011 with a total of 10 nests and with a nesting population of about 40 pairs in 2015, reduced to about 30 pairs in 2017.

Fairy Tern *Gygis alba* breeds throughout the atoll, excluding Ile aux Goëlettes, with up to 500 pairs in 2015, but the population declined after Cyclone Fantala to about 100 pairs in March 2017. The species is mainly found on Ile du Nord.

## Recommendations

Seabirds are important indicators of climate change and the health of the oceans and Farquhar Atoll is one of the most important seabird sites in the Indian Ocean. It is therefore important to establish a funding mechanism to continue the long-term monitoring of seabirds at Farquhar Atoll beyond the lifetime of the OIP, which will expire in 2019. ICS operates Conservation Centres at Alphonse and Desroches with plans to open a further centre at Poivre. Alphonse and Desroches Conservation Centres are funded mainly by conservation levies on each tourist visitor to the islands, together with direct subsidies from IDC and other contributions. Endowment Funds have been established with a UK investment company to provide further long term financial security to conservation activities. While tourist visitors to Farquhar are fewer in number, limited to small groups of mainly fly-fishermen, similar mechanisms should be sought to support the continuation of conservation activities.

Visits to tern breeding sites should be limited in order to minimise disturbance. During the breeding season there should be no visits except for the purposes of monitoring from a safe distance, possibly by deploying a drone to photograph from afar without alarming nesting birds. ICS and IDC should collaborate to ensure that there are no unsupervised landings whatsoever at either Bancs du Sable or the newly emerged island where Greater Crested Terns have bred.

The growth in the number of breeding Red-footed Boobies lends powerful support to the recent recommendation that the boundaries of the Islets of Farquhar IBA should be extended to encompass the whole of Farquhar Atoll (Millett *et al.* 2016). In 2001,

Ile du Sud was excluded from the IBA designation as it contained just a small number of breeding seabirds, but the subsequent dramatic expansion of the colony of Red-footed Booby means that Farquhar Atoll now holds populations of four seabird species that exceed Category A4i and this fourth species breeds entirely outside of the Islets of Farquhar IBA. The new boundary incorporating Ile du Sud in particular is consistent with the Government of Seychelles' recognition of Ile du Sud as a National Park, IUCN Category II.

A regional DNA study should be initiated to investigate the origin of Red-footed Boobies including at Farquhar and the relationship between different regional colonies. At Farquhar this would include some white-tailed brown morph birds which have apparently come from a colony or colonies outside Seychelles. Ideally, the study should encompass collection of samples from colonies at Aldabra, Cosmoledo, Marie Louise, Europa and Tromelin.

It is critical to understand the foraging areas of seabird species breeding at Farquhar Atoll, particularly the Red-footed booby and Sooty Terns, in order to conserve them. A seabird tracking programme should be developed.

## Acknowledgements

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***Adrian Skerrett***
*Email: askerrett@hotmail.com*

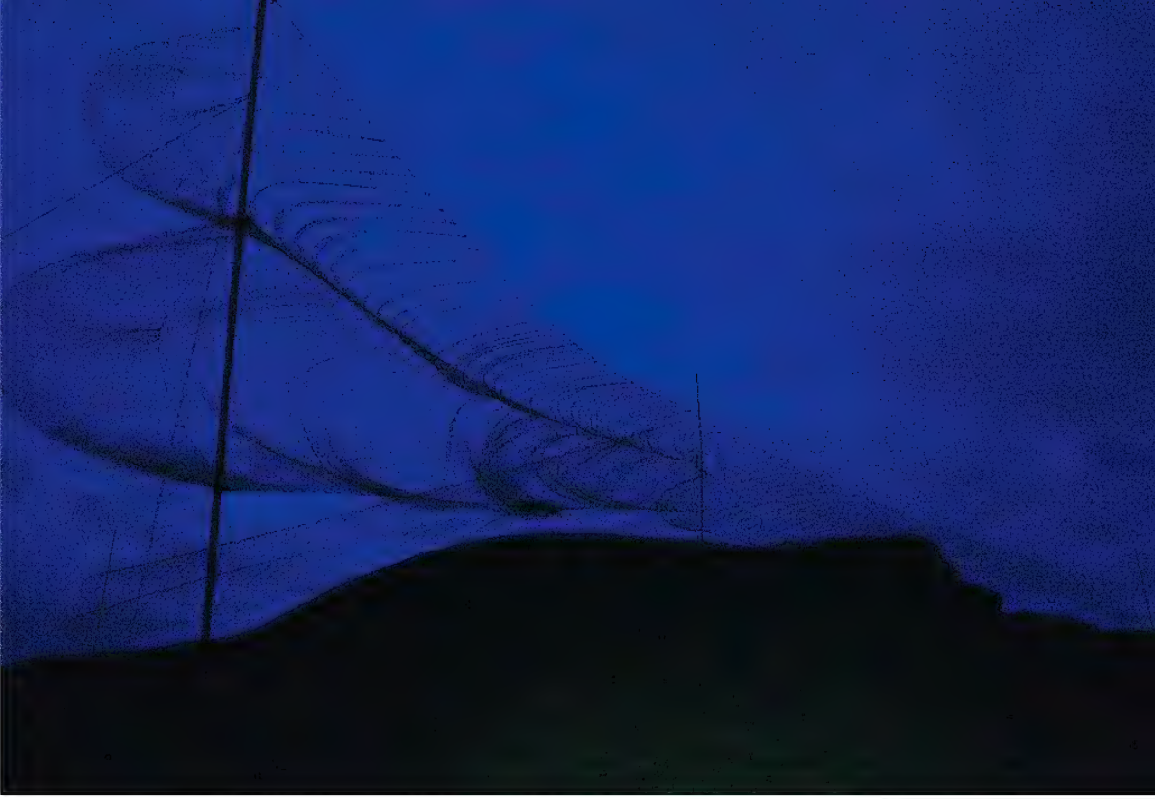

**Plate 6.** A 'Y' of wader nets set for shearwaters at Porth Ysgaden. The speakers are placed near the central pole.

# Results from the ringing of Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* and European Storm-petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* at sound lures on the Lleyn Peninsula, North Wales

by PJ Belman

*(Photographs by the author)*

In autumn 2010, fellow BTO ringer Kelvin Jones introduced me to catching seabirds at night using sound lures on the coastal headlands of the Lleyn Peninsula in North Wales. Since then I have improved my catching methods to trap a total of 153 adult Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* and 98 adult European Storm-petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* (hereafter Storm-petrels) at two headlands eight km apart on the Peninsula. Of these, seven Manx Shearwaters and 17 Storm-petrels had already been ringed at other UK sites.

## Ringing sites

The two sites I operate are on the north coast of Lleyn, both facing directly out onto Caernarfon Bay in the Irish Sea. Porth Ysgaden, Tudweiliog, 52.9N 4.6W, is a low rocky grass-topped cliff slope with a small sandy natural harbour adjacent. Porth Iago, Llangwynnadl, 52.9N 4.7W, is marginally higher but also a rocky grass-topped cliff slope with a sandy beach on the inland side. At night, only a few scattered lights can be seen from local farms and homesteads nearby although there is some distant lighting visible in coastal towns to the northeast and on Anglesey. On the horizon, sky glow from the lights of the city of Dublin, 115 km away, and from the Welsh towns of Holyhead (60 km), Bangor (50 km) and Pwllheli (15 km) is usually evident.

## Techniques

The basic technique I use is to play back amplified sound recordings at night using speakers placed underneath or near mist nets. I operate two discrete groups of nets at each site, one with speakers playing back shearwater recordings and the other using petrel recordings. I use 15 m long two-panel wader nets with three nets set in a Y (see Plates 6 and 7), or T pattern for the shearwaters and either a single net or two nets set in a V for the petrels. The nets are erected on the slopes and cliff tops just before dusk and taken down at very first light or sooner if conditions become unsuitable. They are checked at frequent intervals throughout the night and all birds caught are processed on site and released quickly. I am allowed access to both cliff tops by Land Rover which provides a convenient base to process the birds within a few metres of the nets. I use MP3 players connected to up to three 30W twin speaker amplifier systems and supplement this with additional players connected to 1W mini-amplifiers. In earlier years, I used mini-speakers alone for Storm-petrels and they did attract small numbers to the nets. I routinely use these smaller speakers to play back recordings of other rarer species of petrel and shearwater through the night, including Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*, but so far without success.

**Plate 7.** Speakers placed near the central pole of a 'Y' of wader nets set for shearwaters.

Initially, I minimised the use of a torch when checking the nets, believing that birds might be deterred by the light. After finding that I was sometimes flushing or tripping over Manx Shearwaters that had been sitting quietly near the speakers or under the nets, I started to carry a hand net and use a bright white LED head torch when in the catching areas. Any grounded birds are dazzled by the light and about a quarter of the nightly shearwater catch can be made by simply picking them up (Plate 8).

Using a light has also been informative about the behaviour of each species at the speakers. From time to time individual Manx Shearwaters can be heard calling as they fly overhead. My impression is that they first pass over the speakers at some height. Often, after hearing a calling bird go over, I have found a bird in the nets or settled on the

ground at the next check. I have also watched shearwaters against the light of the sky making low passes over the speakers without calling and being caught in the nets. Shearwaters seem to arrive at the speakers one at a time.

I never find Storm-petrels on the ground when checking the nets. Sometimes I have seen them in the light of my head torch, circling low near the nets in buoyant flight. Even with the light on, birds can be seen to approach the speakers or get caught in the nets. On several occasions I have been extracting a Storm-petrel from a net with my torch on and another has entered the net close by me. Storm-petrels appear to come to the speakers in small groups.

Dark moonless nights are traditionally thought to be best for catching both species. On the Lleyn Peninsula, the frequent high winds and wet weather limit the occasions when mist nets can safely be used, so if conditions are otherwise suitable I do try even under moonlight and clear skies. Although few birds are caught on bright nights, the only weather condition in which I have caught absolutely no birds was in a sea fog which developed part way through a session.

I set nets 21 times at various dates between 23 June and 11 September 2015 and caught Storm-petrels throughout. Manx Shearwaters have been caught between 23 June and 25 August, with most between 21July and 21 August. Both species were caught at a steady rate between these dates with no evidence that numbers peak at a specific time.

## Biometrics

All birds were weighed and measured and examined for moult. Wing length was taken using the maximum chord method (Redfern & Clark 2001). Manx Shearwater weights were recorded to the nearest 5g and Storm-petrel weights to the nearest 0.1g. The biometrics for Manx Shearwaters are given in Table 1 and Storm-petrels in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Biometrics of adult Manx Shearwaters trapped from June to August on the Lleyn Peninsula.

| | Mean | SD | Range | Sample size |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wing length (mm) | 238.87 | 4.40 | 229–249 | 155 |
| Weight (g) | 389.35 | 24.82 | 340–485 | 156 |

**Table 2.** Biometrics of adult Storm-petrels trapped from June to September on the Lleyn Peninsula.

| | Mean | SD | Range | Sample size |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wing length (mm) | 120.30 | 2.45 | 115–126 | 98 |
| Weight (g) | 25.69 | 1.68 | 21.8–30.7 | 98 |

No wing or tail moult was noted in any of the Manx Shearwaters. However, 13 of the 98 Storm Petrels were in an early stage of wing moult, with primary moult scores (Loc cit) between 1 and 11 (out of a possible 50).

Neither species is currently known to nest on the mainland of the Lleyn Peninsula (Brenchley *et al.* 2013). The nearest Manx Shearwater colony is on Bardsey Island, with larger colonies on Skomer and Skokholm, Pembrokeshire (135 km SSW) and smaller numbers on the Copeland Islands, Co Down (200 km NNW) plus a few on the Calf of Man (130 km N). There is a small Storm-petrel colony on Bardsey Island and larger ones on the Pembrokeshire islands (Lloyd *et al.* 1991).

## Ringing results

The ringing returns from the Manx Shearwaters in this study show that many of the birds caught come from the Bardsey Island colony. Five of these were ringed as adults, one 21 years, one 15 years, two nine years and one three months previously. Two were ringed as nestlings, one three years and one four years previously. One bird from Porth Ysgaden was recaptured on Bardsey four years later and another from Porth Iago three years later. Another Porth Ysgaden bird was recaptured on the Calf of Man 11 nights after ringing. So far, no birds have been reported from more distant colonies, although with the limited numbers ringed, that is not unexpected.

Three Manx Shearwaters have been caught on the headlands more than once. One ringed at Porth Iago was caught two nights later at Porth Ysgaden. Another made the reverse movement, again with a two-night interval. A third ringed at Porth Iago on 21 August 2014 was caught at Porth Ysgaden on 7 August 2015 and was back at Porth Iago on 17 August 2015.

## Understanding Manx Shearwater movements

All Manx Shearwaters caught have been in adult plumage. Although birds of the year can be readily distinguished in the hand, I would not expect to catch any as they do not fledge until late August or early September and are thought to leave directly for their wintering areas in the South Atlantic (Brooke 1990).

It is hard to draw conclusions as to why shearwaters which are old enough already to be well established as breeding birds on Bardsey Island are coming to investigate sound lures some distance up the coast. That some birds come in to both headlands a few days apart or the following year would suggest that they are perhaps feeding or passing by relatively close inshore on a regular basis. I do not know how far the

**Plate 8.** Manx Shearwaters often land near the speakers and can be picked up by hand.

**Plate 9.** Storm-petrels are ringed in large numbers at sound lures at many coastal sites in western Europe.

playback sound travels out to sea to be effective in attracting birds, but depending on the wind speed and direction my guess is that it could be over one km. GPS tracking of breeding Manx Shearwaters from Skomer Island has shown that birds fly some distance from the colony to forage in Cardigan Bay, the north-west and northern sectors of the Irish Sea, and to a lesser extent the southern Irish Sea and Bristol Channel (Guilford *et al.* 2008). It would not be unreasonable to think that some breeding birds, while away from their colonies and feeding in favoured parts of Caernarfon Bay, do take time to investigate sound lures.

## Understanding Storm-petrel data

The Storm-petrel ringing returns are more complex. Spence (2015) has summarised the results from catching 847 new and 39 previously ringed Storm-petrels at Strumble Head, Pembrokeshire between 1991 and 2003. These show a wide range of movements between Ireland, Wales, the Isle of Man, the western isles of Scotland, the Orkneys and the North Sea coast of Scotland and England, as well as the English Channel and the Bristol Channel. Mainwood (1976) analysed the movements of all Storm-petrels reported through the BTO ringing scheme up to 1975 and concluded that many of the birds shown to be moving between colonies were probably ringed in their second or third year and paying casual visits to a number of colonies and non-breeding areas before breeding at four or five years old.

The returns from my study show four birds moving to and from the west of Scotland, one from the Isle of Man, two from the east coast of England and six exchanges with Pembrokeshire. The largest number, nine birds, involves the small colony on Bardsey Island. In addition, one bird ringed at Porth Iago in July 2012 was recaptured at Porth Ysgaden in July 2013.

Some Storm-petrels were recaptured very soon after ringing. One ringed at Blue Point, Isle of Man on 22 July 2015 was at Porth Ysgaden on 29 July 2015. Another ringed at Ailsa Craig, S Ayrshire on 23 July 2015, was at Porth Iago on 13 August 2015. A bird ringed at Souter Lighthouse, Tyne and Wear on 19 July 2015 was caught at Skokholm Island on 6 August 2015 and then at Porth Ysgaden on 16 August 2015. Another from Inner Farne, Northumberland on 11 August 2015 was at Porth Iago on 17 August 2015. One from Skokholm, Pembrokeshire ringed on 6 August 2015 was at Porth Ysgaden on 25 August 2015 and another from St Justinian, Pembrokeshire on 30 July 2016 was at Porth Iago on 1 August 2016. The longest interval between ringing and recapture was a bird ringed on Eilean Nan Ron, Highland on 27 July 2004 and recaptured at Porth Iago on 1 August 2016.

The nine Storm-petrels moving to or from Bardsey Island did so either in the same year of ringing (interval 1 to 24 nights) or (three birds) the following year. One bird ringed at Porth Iago on 6 August 2015 was recaptured on Bardsey on 16 August 2015 and again on 13 June 2016.

It seems likely from the pattern of movements that the Storm-petrels I catch on the Lleyn Peninsula are a mix of wandering immatures and perhaps some local breeders from the colony on Bardsey. As yet though, none of the birds exchanged with Bardsey has been confirmed as breeding there.

To conclude, mist netting seabirds on rocky cliffs on dark nights may be considered an unusual activity, but after six years it is pleasing to be able to report some results from that work.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Kelvin Jones for introducing me to luring Manx Shearwaters, to Robin Evans and Gareth Parry-Owen for allowing access to their land and to Michael Casement and Stephen Chapman who encouraged me to write this paper. My daughter Aisha has provided enthusiastic company from the age of 3 and my wife Rubina has tolerated us both returning home in the early hours.

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***PJ Belman***
*Email: pjbelman@csi.com*

# Look out for unusual Cory's Shearwaters

by Dr F Zino (RNBWS Madeira rep) and
F Esteves (a Masters student in Conservation Biology)
*(Photographs by F Zino)*

One of the original wardens of the Selvagem Nature Reserve, Fernando Almada, an old hunter turned warden, assured PA Zino and his son Frank that he had seen a totally white Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*. Almada was a hugely experienced and loyal warden on the Selvagens, but as he also had a liking for *poncha*, a mixture of firewater and lemon and honey, his stories of a totally white Cory's Shearwater were not taken too seriously.

However, in August 2009 we came across a totally white Cory's chick!

This was photographed alongside a normal Cory's chick, see Plate 10, and the difference is obvious. Both were returned to their nests where their parents continued to feed them.

The same bird was again handled on 25 October, just prior to fledging. It had been ringed LV00394.

During development it had developed a number of pale brown feathers, but was still very much whiter than a normal Cory's (Plate 11).

It eventually fledged and appeared to be in excellent condition. If it has managed to survive, the time for it to start returning to the island is about now and we should be aware and search the area carefully, as Cory's tend to return to the same area in which they were born.

**Plate 10.** *The 2009 white Cory's chick alongside a normal one.*

**Plate 11.** *The same 2009 white chick, just prior to fledging.*

No more white Cory's were found until this year, when in October we came across a totally white juvenile.

This chick was also in excellent condition and has been ringed L92775.

Unlike the 2009 bird, it had not developed any brown on the wings and was totally white with pink feet, but brown eyes (Plates 12a, 12b, 13).

**Plate 12a.** *The 2016 white juvenile.*

**Plate 12b.** *The 2016 white juvenile.*

It eventually fledged on the 11th November, which is later than normal, but then in 2016 many of the Cory's chicks fledged later than normal. In normal years there are no juveniles left on the nest after about the 7 November.

We would thus ask Naval birders to keep an eye open for an unusual very pale bird in the South Atlantic. At the same time we are hopeful that the 2009 bird may return to the Selvagens this coming year.

Blood has been taken from both birds, which were found within 100m of each other and there may be a common denominator.

***Frank Zino***
*Email: fzino@netmadeira.com*

**Plate 13.** *FZ with his white Cory's!*

**Plate 14.** South Georgia Pipit nestlings. © *JC Travelography*

# South Georgia Update 2017

by A Neil, Director of the South Georgia Heritage Trust

Signs of recovery are everywhere on South Georgia following the baiting of the entire rodent-infested area of the island by the Trust in 2011 (Phase 1), 2013 (Phase 2) and 2015 (Phase 3). The Phase 1 area at King Edward Point/Grytviken is populated throughout the year, but no rat sign has been reported. Instead the air is full of pipit song and nests are being discovered regularly. South Georgia Pintails *Anas georgica georgica* proudly lead out their broods of ducklings, to the delight of the King Edward Point residents. The 57,000 hectares baited in 2013 were given an initial check in 2014, and along with the Phase 3 area will be surveyed again from November 2017 to April 2018, using a combination of detection devices and highly trained sniffer dogs.

Tourists are also delighted to report that pintails and South Georgia Pipits *Anthus antarcticus* are breeding in numbers once again on the mainland, and there are strong indications that other species such as the Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* are on the increase. If by April 2018 the survey team finds no evidence of survivors the island will be declared rodent free.

Thanks to all the members of RNBWS for their support and interest in our work.

***Alison Neil***
*Email: alison.neil@sght.org*

# Madeira and Zino's Petrel, a 2017 Progress Report

by CPO M Cutts

Readers of last year's *Sea Swallow* will know that RNBWS members David Dobson and Stephen Chapman visited Madeira in July 2016 to assist Dr Frank Zino in conservation work with Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira*, and to see if this was a worthwhile project for RNBWS in the coming years. That recce visit was a great success. It was followed up this year by another two-man team, myself and Jacques Turner-Moss, recently studying conservation at Aberystwyth University, and like me a trained bird ringer.

We spent six nights high up on the Pico, in weather that was always fine but with hugely variable winds. We observed that when we just had light airs there was very little petrel movement, but on windy nights they could be more active. However, Frank's comment was that this was probably coincidental, as the number of birds varies in all weather conditions. He also said that when there is a full moon you see more birds than you hear call.

Three birds were caught. The first escaped; it was quite high in the net and in the process of bringing the net lower for extraction the bird slipped out and was gone - very frustrating. The two birds we did catch were on our third and fourth nights, and by this time we had a system in place and had no trouble extracting the birds, ringing them and taking the appropriate biometric measurements, as well as looking for lice and taking blood, prior to release.

The new 18m net that the RNBWS provided proved to be great for the task. We discussed using a net further down the path to increase catch rate but this could only be achieved on nights when there are more ringers present.

Each night when we returned from netting at Arieiro we found a large number of moths attracted to the lights of the buildings surrounding the radar station at the top. Frank photographed these and gave us copies, together with many images from past visits, in the hope that we may be able to identify the moths in slow time - there may well be endemics among them.

**Plate 15.** Mark (left) Jacques and Zino's Petrel. © *M Cutts*

I asked Frank about the current health of Zino's Petrel as a species - I had a feeling that total numbers were about 60–80 breeding pairs. He thinks there could well be some 300–400 in the world now, which is a good recovery from the dark days after the devastating 2010 fire (see *Sea Swallow* 62: 4). Incidentally. there was another serious fire in autumn 2016, and while it never affected the breeding grounds it did burn down the Parque Natural da Madeira hut with all the conservation kit - a huge blow.

Another aspect of the bird's health is who is going to take over from Frank in the future - for even he can't go on for ever. The short answer is NYK, and meanwhile Frank has to tread a delicate path, for it seems that on Madeira conservation has considerable political overtones. This is all the more reason for RNBWS to continue to assist with this work.

I also asked Frank about his other conservation work. He has been monitoring Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris diomedea* on two rectangles of the Selvagen Islands since 1971. The work was originally carried out in conjunction with Christian Jouanin and Francis Roux of the Paris Natural History Museum. Sadly, both are now dead, but many papers were published over the years. The work is now carried out by Frank with the assistance of his wife Buffy and one paper on the population recovery has been published in *Oryx,* with another on the way. Sadly, Mike Hounsome who was doing all the statistics suddenly died and this has delayed publication of the paper.

Frank visits the Selvagen Islands,162 nautical miles away, several times a year, usually courtesy of the Portuguese Navy, without whose efforts the reserve, originally set up by Frank's father, would no longer exist. The Portuguese have done an amazing job, using flat-bottomed patrol boats built for the rivers of Africa and which are now having to cope with the Atlantic. The boats are 50 years old and in a poor state, but hopefully will soon be replaced.

Apart from our work on the mountain we did one short pelagic trip from Machico, during which we saw Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae*, Cory's Shearwater, Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*, Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*, Bottlenose Dolphins *Tursiops truncatus* and Short-finned Pilot Whales *Globicephala macrorhynchus*.

We also hired a car and toured the island, seeing the majority of the avifauna that Madeira has to offer. As for endemics, at Ribeiro Frio we had excellent views of Madeiran Firecrest *Regulus madeirensis*, and a little further up the valley eventually saw a number of the Trocaz Pigeons *Colomba trocaz* flying across the laurel forest. We also saw a good number of butterflies and were amazed at the quantity and variety of Madeiran Wall Lizards *Lacerta dugesii.* They were everywhere.

In conclusion, it was an honour to be bird ringing with Frank Zino, a man of great knowledge and achievements, and a man whose company we greatly enjoyed. This is definitely a worthwhile project for the RNBWS.

***Mark Cutts***
*Email: expeditions@rnbws.org.uk*

**Plate 16.** (l to r) Fairy Prion, Black Petrel and New Zealand Petrel in the Hauraki Gulf.

# Seabirds of the Chatham Islands and Bollons Seamount 11–29 January 2016

by Dr C Rogers

*(All photographs except Plate 19b by the author)*

## Introduction

Following two short trips off the North Island of New Zealand to photograph New Zealand Storm-petrel *Pealeornis maoriana* and other seabirds, I sailed on 11 January with twelve other seabird enthusiasts on board the *Claymore II* from the port of Tauranga, on the North Island, in search of two of the rarest seabirds, the Chatham Petrel, *Pterodroma axillaris*, and the Magenta Petrel, *Pterodroma magentae*.

The trip was organised by Robert Flood and Kirk Zufelt and the plan was to sail to the Chatham Islands and spend some time there searching for the two petrels at sea. Also on the agenda was a visit to the Sweetwater Conservation Covenant, a key breeding location for the Magenta Petrel, and trips to see the other Chatham Island endemics. Leaving the Chatham Islands, the plan involved a visit to the Bollons Seamount, a recently discovered foraging area for the Chatham Petrel (Raynar *et al.* 2012), and a visit to the Bounty Islands with some time over the Bounty Trough before heading back to Akoroa on the South Island of New Zealand. In addition to the two main targets the intention was also to see and photograph as many of the other seabirds as possible. The planned route is indicated on the map overleaf.

**Figure 1.** Map of proposed route. T = Tauranga (departure point); C = Chatham Islands; BS = Bollons Seamount; B = Bounty islands; A = Akoroa (endpoint).

The two key albatross species targeted were the Chatham Island *Diomedea cauta eremita* and Salvin's *D. cauta salvini*, and in addition, Buller's *D. bulleri*, Royal *D. epomophora* and Wandering Albatross *D. exulans* were expected. Other possible sightings included a feast of *Pterodroma* species including, Soft-plumaged *P. mollis*, White-headed *P. lessonii*, Cook's *P. cookii*, Pycroft's *P. pycrofti*, Black-winged *P. nigripennis*, Mottled, *P. inexpectata* and even White-necked *P. cervicalis*. Of the shearwaters, Little, both *Puffinis elegans* and *P. assimilis* were possible, although on reflection it is not clear why these are split. Buller's Shearwater *P. bulleri*, and Hutton's *P. huttoni*, were expected along the coast of South Island. Prion species probable on the trip, particularly near the Chathams, included Fairy *Pachyptila turtur*, Broad-billed *P. vittata*, Antarctic *P. desolata*, which breed on the Antipodes Islands, and Fulmar *P. crassirostris*, particularly at the Bounty Islands. Of the Storm-petrels Black-bellied *Fregetta tropica*, Grey-backed *Garrodia nereis*, and White-faced *Pelagodroma marina* were expected, the last particularly in the vicinity of the Chatham Islands.

## Pre-departure trips to Hauraki Gulf and Red Mercury Island

Prior to the departure for the Chatham Islands a smaller group of us made two short trips targeting New Zealand Storm-petrel and Pycroft's Petrel. The first from Sandspit was on board the *Assassin* with Brett Rathe and was very successful with at least 50 New Zealand Storm-petrels recorded. Brett Rathe certainly knows how to find these birds and we were treated to a steady stream over the day as they were attracted close to the boat by fish scraps. What soon became apparent was the diversity in plumage; some with obvious stripes while some have less distinct dark smudges on the flanks. These features are illustrated in Plates 17a–b.

The second pre-departure trip was an afternoon trip out to Red Mercury and vicinity where numerous Pycroft's Petrel passed the boat giving good photo opportunities.

In addition to the two species the two pre-trip excursions yielded a good collection of New Zealand seabirds with lots of opportunities for photographs. White-faced Storm-petrels *Pelagodroma marina*, Fairy Prions *Pachyptila turtur* and Buller's Shearwater were common with some Fluttering Shearwaters *Puffinus gavia* near Red Mercury and Black Petrel *Procellaria parkinsoni* in the Hauraki Gulf. Cook's Petrel were present at both locations but most common in the Hauraki Gulf.

These two species are relatively easy to distinguish on shape once you have your eye in. Also, note the longer bill, darker eye patch, distinct eyebrow and paler grey plumage of Cook's and the obvious breast patch of Pycroft's - absent in Cook's Petrel.

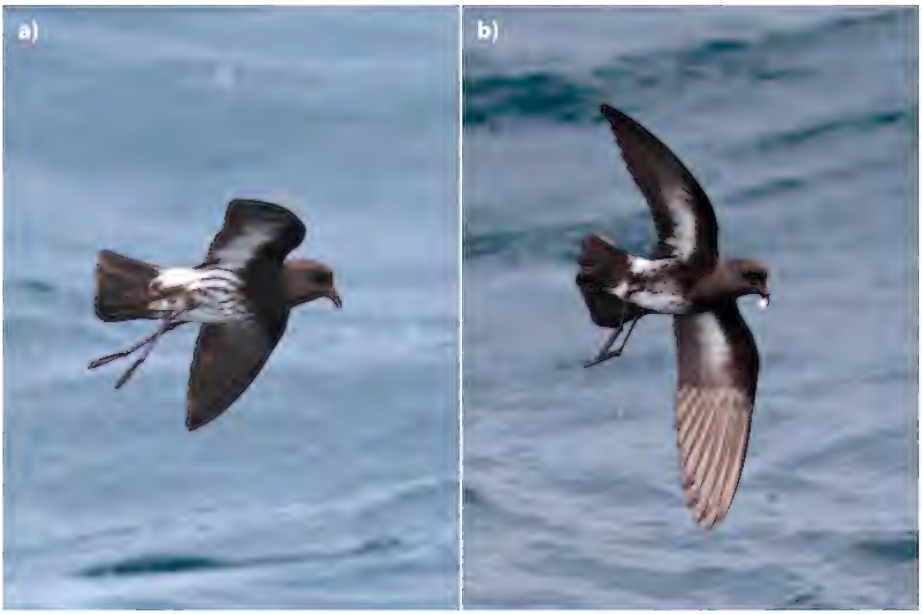


**Plate 17. (a)** Typical New Zealand Storm-Petrel showing stripes on the flanks and belly. **(b)** New Zealand Storm-petrel showing heavy smudging rather than stripes on the flanks.

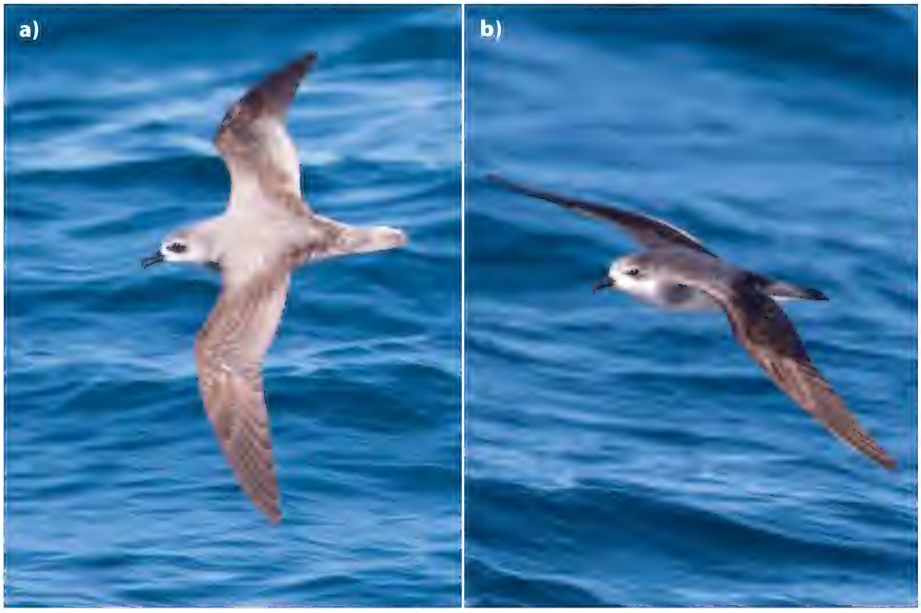


**Plate 18. (a)** Cook's Petrel Hauaki Gulf and **(b)** Pycroft's Petrel off Red Mercury Island.

## Chatham Islands

After sailing from Tauranga on 11 January the initial interesting encounter was with the first of several White-necked Petrel, somewhat south of their usual range, and a small number of Little Shearwater that flew rapidly up the wake and then diverted away.

The major excitement occurred on day two of the trip when about 100 nm off Hawke Bay on North Island we encountered our first Chatham Petrel. The bird approached the vessel up the port side of the wake before crossing to starboard where it performed a loop before slipping away. In the excitement, I managed to get a few photographs, two of which are reproduced in Plates 19a–b. As this species is seldom seen at sea, let alone photographed, the extent and intensity of the black on the underwing came as a surprise. Another feature that was confirmed with later sightings was the similarity of the dorsal appearance with that of Soft-plumaged Petrel. A Chatham Petrel keeping close to the water, with no ventral view, could be overlooked as a Soft-plumaged Petrel (as illustrated in Plate 19b).

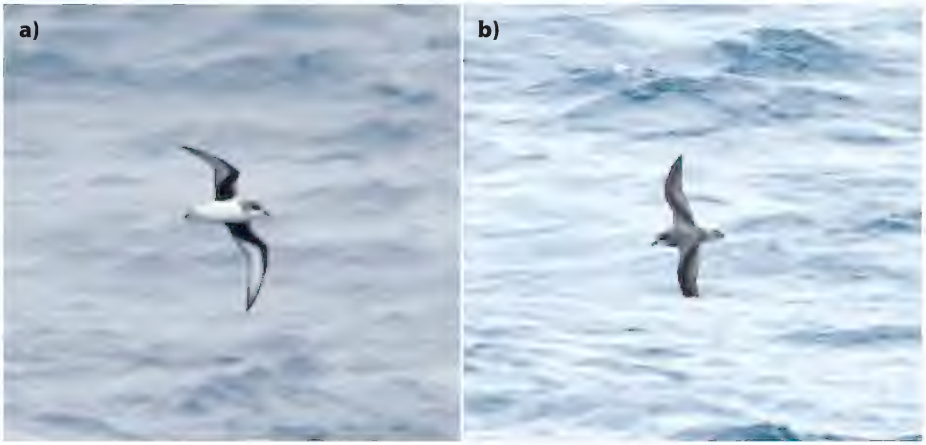


**Plate 19.** Chatham Island Petrel showing **(a)** ventral and **(b)** dorsal views.

Approaching the Chatham Islands, we contacted the volunteers and researchers running the Magenta Petrel breeding colony at Sweetwater and went ashore before bad weather moved in. The visit to the breeding colony at Sweetwater can only be described as spectacular. *(The successful translation of Chatham Petrels at Sweetwater was described by Stephen Chapman in Sea Swallow 63, following a visit to the island in December 2013. Ed)*

Low cloud and mist hung over the area as we entered the well protected colony. While it was still light we were shown a Chatham Petrel (Plate 20a). But much more was to come. As darkness closed in, the chattering of Chatham Petrels could be heard as a few circled overhead, and then crash-landed into trees on their way to their burrows (18 pairs breed there). Soon the more mournful call of the Magenta Petrel (Chatham Island Taiko) could also be heard. In the dark it was difficult to pick up anything more than shadowy moving shapes in the mist. But not to be outdone, one of the researchers checked two burrows known to hold non-breeding (single) birds and managed to show us two birds, one of which is the bird in Plate 20b. The highlights kept coming as several other birds emerged from burrows and waddled around on the forest floor to the delight of everyone present.

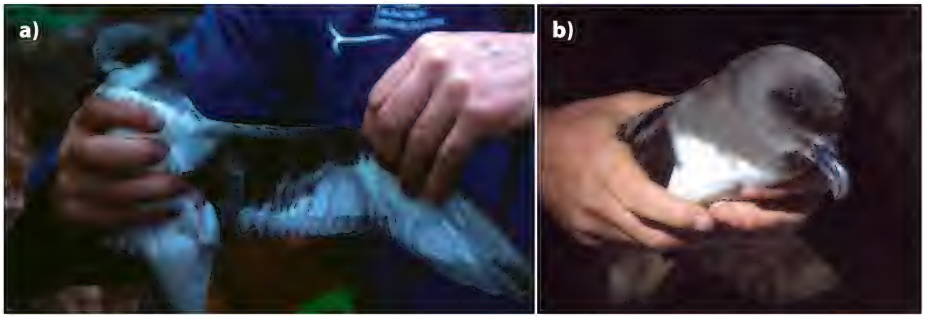


**Plate 20.** Petrels at the Sweetwater breeding colony; **(a)** Chatham Island Petrel **(b)** Magenta Petrel (Taiko) © *P Harrison*

After leaving Sweetwater, sated with Magenta Petrel, the next morning we returned to the *Claymore II* and made several short trips to see Shore Plover *Thinornis novaeseelandiae*, which provided great photo opportunities, and Chatham Island Snipe *Coenocorypha pusilla*, which proved very uncooperative. We spent several days off the Chathams near the Pyramid and South-East Island (Rangatira, which holds about 250 breeding pairs of Chatham Petrel), and saw several more Chatham Petrels coming into their breeding sites in the late evening. Unfortunately, these sightings were distant and only poor photographs were obtained. A complete list of sightings of Chatham Petrel from the trip can be found in Flood, Wilson and Zurfelt (2016).

In addition to looking out for the Chatham Petrel we had ample opportunities to photograph the Chatham Island Albatross near the Pyramid, currently its sole breeding location. However, as readers of *Sea Swallow* will know (*Sea Swallow* 64, pp 4–8), plans are underway to get some birds to breed at a protected site on the main island near the Magenta Petrel colony at Sweetwater.

During the breeding season the Chatham Island Albatross does not seem to venture very far from the waters surrounding the Pyramid. Unlike Salvin's Albatross, which is regularly recorded in SE Australian waters, albeit in small numbers, Chatham Island Albatross is very rarely reported, dispersing eastward into the South Pacific Ocean. By comparison, Buller's Albatross is regularly recorded in SE Australian waters, particularly between March and May, and they were recorded regularly throughout this trip.

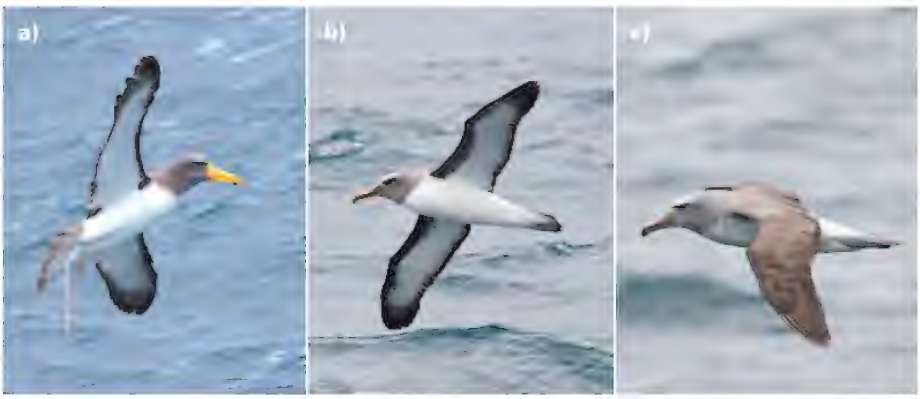


**Plate 21. (a)** Chatham Island, **(b)** Buller's and **(c)** Salvin's Albatross near the Pyramid.

## Bollons Seamount

Following recent research that suggested that Chatham Petrel foraged on the Bollons Seamount, we left the Chathams and sailed south. A small number of Chatham Petrels was seen but none came close enough to match our earlier encounters. Instead we had daily flybys by a good selection of petrels including Soft-plumaged, White-headed, White-necked and Mottled with the occasional Cook's and Pycroft's. A sample is presented in Plate 22.

**Plate 22.** Petrels over the Bollons Seamount; **(a)** Soft-plumaged Petrel, **(b)** Mottled Petrel, **(c)** White-headed Petrel, **(d)** White-necked Petrel.

Failing to find larger numbers of Chatham Petrels on the Bollons we headed for the Bounty Islands to see Fulmar Prion, Erect-crested Penguin *Eudyptes sclateri* and, of course, many more Salvin's Albatross that breed on the Bounty Islands.

## Bounty Islands and the Bounty Trough

The approach to the Bounty Islands was made in exceptionally calm weather and thick fog brought on by warm northerly winds over the colder ocean. This obviously made observation difficult and we lost almost a day to these poor viewing conditions. However, on arrival at the Bounty Islands the fog cleared revealing thousands of Salvin's Albatross and Fulmar Prions with numbers of Erect-crested Penguins in the water.

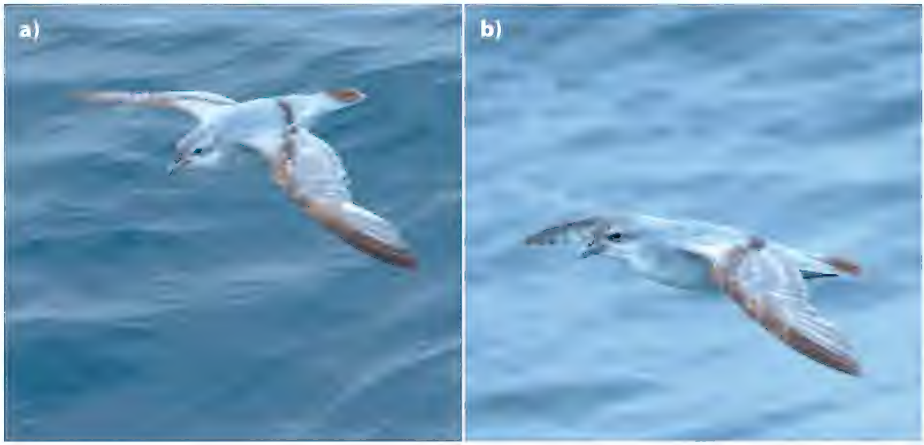


**Plate 23. (a–b)** Fulmar Prions in post-breeding moult, Bounty Islands.

Fulmar Prions were relatively numerous near the islands although numbers were thought to be lower than on previous visits. Away from the breeding islands separating Fulmar from Fairy Prion is not easy and in many cases, may be impossible. Those interested could consult Cox (1980) and Rogers (2014).

**Plate 24.** Erect-crested Penguin, Bounty Islands.

Salvin's Albatross proved very obliging and a few Antarctic Terns *Sterna vittata* flew past the ship.

Moving away from the Bounty Islands we planned to spend some time over the Bounty Trench looking for and hopefully photographing some Magenta Petrel at sea. That task was initially hampered by sea fog but when that lifted we had some excellent photo opportunities with prions and Storm-petrels. Unfortunately, our encounter with the only Magenta Petrel at sea did not go so well.

In exceptionally calm conditions chumming with oil and fish scraps brought Black-bellied, Grey-backed and White-faced Storm petrels close enough to get some good photographs as illustrated in Plates 25 and 26.

**Plate 25.** Storm Petrels over the Bounty Trough; **(a)** Black-bellied Storm-petrel, **(b)** Black-bellied Storm-petrel showing significant white patches in the tail, **(c)** Grey-backed Storm-petrel, **(d)** White-faced Storm-petrel.

Small numbers of prions were also attracted to the chum and although most were Fairy Prions there were some broader-billed birds suggesting Antarctic prion (Plate 26a) and some with even heavier blue bills consistent with Salvin's or Broad-billed Prion (Plate 26b). We recorded only one or two possible Broad-billed Prion which was surprising considering that very large numbers breed on South East Island in the Chathams and are putting pressure on the Chatham Petrels that breed there. Broad-billed Prions were certainly not concentrated around the Chatham Islands during our visit.

In addition to photographing prions and storm-petrels we were continually on the look-out for Magenta Petrel. One did eventually appear but it was just as the ship was altering course so giving directions to get everyone onto it was difficult. A very lucky few saw it pass at some distance down the port side but no good photographs were obtained.

Throughout the trip we had regular sightings of the New Zealand races of Wandering Albatross, *D. antipodensis* and *gibsoni* as illustrated in Plate 27. Southern Royal Albatross also put in a few appearances.

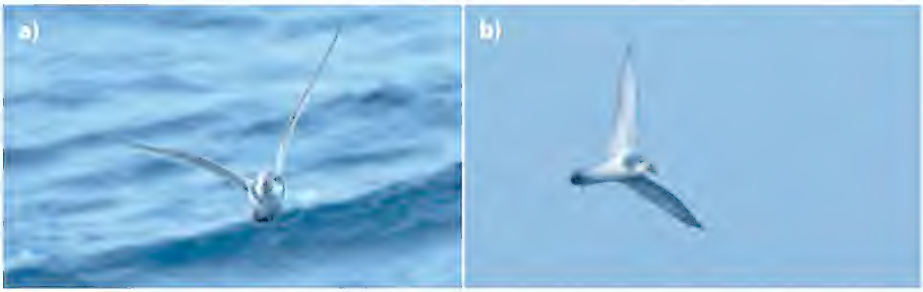


**Plate 26. (a)** Antarctic Prion, **(b)** Salvin's or Broad-billed Prion over the Bounty Trough.

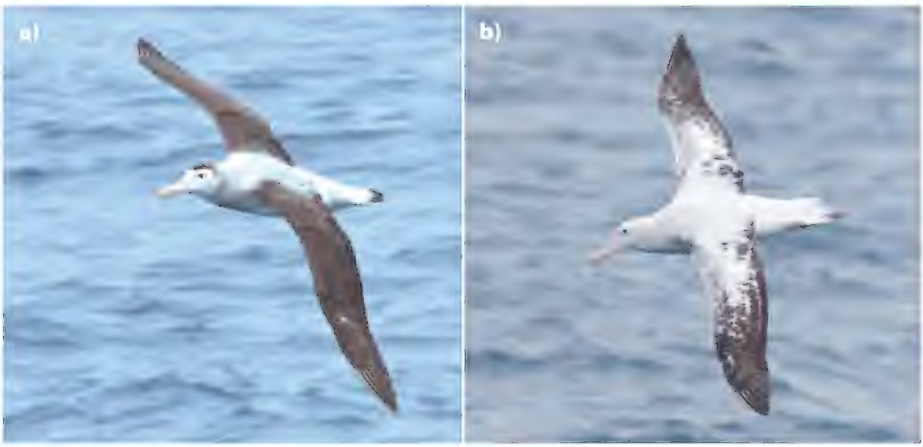


**Plate 27.** Wandering Albatross; **(a)** *D. antipodensis*, **(b)** *D. gibsoni*.

Approaching the end of the trip at Akorora, Westland Petrels *Procellaria westlandica* appeared and closer inshore, numbers of Hutton's Shearwater increased along with a solitary Pink-footed Shearwater *Puffinus creatopus* that was well out of range but is now recorded off the east coast of New Zealand in small numbers.

As we disembarked at Akorora everyone agreed that it was an amazing sea-birding adventure, thanks to the excellent organization and planning by Bob Flood and Kirk Zufelt.

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***Colin Rogers***
*Email: colin.rogers@adelaide.edu.au*

**Plate 28.** Adelie Penguin on ice flow.

# Antarctic wildlife cruise, 1994

by Commander AY Norris

*(Photographs by S Copsey)*

As places to visit, polar regions are not everybody's cup of tea. Perhaps this is just as well, given that they have delicate ecosystems, slight damage to which often has long-lasting effects. I had worked and travelled in the Arctic in the past but I had never been to Antarctica although I spent some time in the early sixties in sub-antarctic waters beyond Australia and New Zealand. Mid-January 1994 found me setting off southwards by way of Paris, Brazil, Argentina and Chile to join the German-owned *World Discoverer* at Puerto Williams, which is situated on Navarino Island on the Beagle Channel, about 67 mile north of Cape Horn. The programme involved cruising the Antarctic Peninsula, the South Shetlands, the northern rim of the Weddell Sea, South Georgia, and ending up in the Falklands from where I would fly home.

*World Discoverer* was an ice-capable ship of 3,200 tons with comfortable accommodation for 140 passengers, fitted out with an impressive array of navigation equipment, appropriate boats for her tasking and fitted with stabilisers for rough conditions (though in the atrocious weather we experienced they seemed to have very little effect).

The ship's officers were led by Captain Karl-Ulrich Lampe, an experienced Master in polar regions, and all were thoroughly competent German seamen and engineers. The guides and leaders were North Americans, all prominent in their field; the ship's artist was an accomplished draughtsman and painter. Most of the passengers were birdwatchers but there were geographers, oceanographers and biologists too.

Stopovers at various international airports and at Santiago in Chile produced some interest. The grassland of the airport at São Paulo had twelve Crested Caracaras *Caracara cheriway,* each of them seemingly oblivious to the operation of huge airliners; a little enclosed garden in the terminus at Buenos Aires was visited by a single Chalk-browed Mockingbird *Minus saturninus* and two Patagonian Mockingbirds *M. patagonicus;* the hotel garden at Santiago in the evening produced

Austral Thrushes *Turdus falcklandii,* Eared Doves *Zenaida auriculata* and a succession of flitting forms which defied generic let alone specific identification; Punta Arenas likewise tantalized, especially with small, brown ducks and flashes of passerines but Brown-headed Gulls *Larus brunnicephalus* and Kelp Gulls *L. dominicanus* showed up.

At the extravagantly-named Puerto Williams I had an early evening walk along a track overlooking the Beagle Channel, the final border between Argentina and Chile. Here, spectacular serrated ridges, the last gasp of the Andes, with beech forests on their lower slopes, overlook the waterway with its necklace of islets. Immediately a succession of birds new to me presented itself: Blue-eyed Cormorants *Phalacrocorax atriceps*, Olivaceous Cormorants *P. basilianus* and Rock Cormorants *P. magellanicus*, Chilean Skuas *Stercorarius chilensis*, South American Terns *Sterna hirundinacea*, Kelp Geese *Chloephaga hybridae* and Upland Geese *C. picta*, Patagonian Flightless Steamer Ducks *Tachyeres pteneres*, Crested Ducks *Lophonetta specularioides*, Speckled Teal *Anas flavirostris*, Chilean Swallows *Tachycineta meyeni* and Rufous-collared Sparrows *Zonotrychia capensis*. Interestingly, waders were absent.

That Cape Horn is a spectacular and storm-cursed place, everyone knows. To steam past it at a range of a mile into a full gale from the SW is a formidable experience, spumes of spray from huge seas creeping 80 feet up its dark grey cliffs above which Blue Petrels *Halobaena caerulea* breed, and where we saw Sooty Shearwaters *Ardenna grisea* streaming eastwards, and Black-browed Albatrosses *Thalassarche melanophris* and Giant Petrels *Macronectes halli* in fair numbers around the ship.

The Drake Passage remained true to its reputation as another violent place. Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans*, Black-browed and Grey-headed Albatrosses *Thalassarche chrysostoma* turned up in numbers, as did several Royals *Diomedea sanfordi* from New Zealand's sub-antarctic islands. Since I had last been at sea off Australia and New Zealand, Peter Harrison's magisterial and remarkable book *Seabirds - an Identification Guide* had been published, and it revolutionised seabird identification. Before that, identification of prions *Pachyptila sp.* in particular was considered unsafe unless the bird was in the hand. The American expert Kevin Zimmer, on the quarterdeck of the ship, using the Harrison system and surface water temperatures, instructed those birders who weren't seasick in the specific identification of these southern petrels so that Thin-billed Prions *Pachyptila belcheri* could be identified. So were the Blue Petrels as they streamed past in numbers.

**Plate 29 (left).** South American Tern. **Plate 30 (right).** Chilean Skua with Black-browed Albatross.

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

f)

g)

h)

**Plate 31 (opposite). (a)** Grey-headed Albatross. **(b)** Blue Petrel. **(c)** Southern Royal Albatross. **(d)** Wandering Albatross. **(e)** Broad-billed Prion. **(f)** Slender-billed Prion. **(g)** Wilson's Storm Petrel. **(h)** Antarctic Tern.

Very cold water of low salinity resulting from melting land and sea ice flows northwards from the Antarctic Continent to meet warmer and more saline water in a zone called the Antarctic Convergence or Polar Front. South of this feature is the Southern Ocean which surrounds the continent. A series of readings of the surface water temperature across an area of the Drake Passage, dropping from 9.5° to 1.5°C, suggested that during our passage the Convergence was some 75 miles wide and situated about halfway between Cape Horn and the Antarctic Peninsula, somewhat wider than others may have recorded. The Convergence delineates the north offshore limit of Antarctica, its maximum width reported to have been ninety miles.

New organisms were met as the ship entered the Southern Ocean while others were left astern. Of the birds, the Broad-billed Prion *Pachyptila vittata* replaced its Thin-billed neighbour; the Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata* replaced the South American species; the Northern Giant Petrel was replaced by its southern relative *Macronectes giganteus;* the Antarctic Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialoides* became evident, while Sooty Shearwaters remained over warmer waters. But numbers of familiar seabird species remained: the striking Pintado or Cape Petrel *Daption capense*, the White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis* and the ubiquitous Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus.* Communities of Antarctic seals were frequent while Leopard Seal *Hydrurga leptonyx* occurred often. The Antarctic Fur Seal *Arctocephalus gazella* replaced the species of South America and the spectacular Hour-glass Dolphin *Largenorhynchtus cruciger* was encountered instead of the Black-chinned species. Humpback whales *Megaptera novaeangliae*, Minke *Baleanoptera acutorostrata,* Arnoux's Beaked Whale *Berardius arnuxii* and Long-finned Pilot Whales *Globicephala melas* were noted. Subsequent experience demonstrated that fish and zooplankton among others were very different from those to the north.

Guarded to its west by a multitude of snow and ice encrusted islands and islets, the coastline of the thousand miles long Antarctic Peninsula is a wonderful place for visiting naturalists in the austral summer. To the east of the peninsula is the Weddell Sea with its immense clockwise gyre which in the polar summer was carrying upon its western limit large numbers of gigantic icebergs looking like a huge fleet of vast aircraft carriers. Many bergs were firmly aground, each with significant tidal lips around their bases. Here was the polar sea-scape of Earnest Shackleton and *Endurance,* 1915/16.

Headlands and islands are sites for often vast concentrations of penguins, Adelie *Pygoscelis adeliae*, Gentoo *P. papua* and Chinstrap *P. antarcticus*, the largest rookery visited being on Paulet Island with an estimated half a million Adelies. Breeding was in full swing, the stench powerful close to and down wind. Arriving back onboard after visiting a penguin rookery, I found that my outer kit was strongly impregnated with the rich smell; television programmes and books omit to mention this characteristic! The ship's track was too far from the colonies of the Emperor Penguin *Aptenodytes forsteri* but single immature birds were found among areas of pack ice.

Steaming in nine tenths pack ice with many fairly small tabular icebergs early upon a fine, calm morning in the Crystal Sound and just beyond the Antarctic Circle produced for me 51 of one of Antarctica's most beautiful birds, the Snow Petrel *Pagodrama nivea*, the smallest of the fulmar species. They were almost dove-like, most of them settled along the crests of the icebergs.

**Plate 32 (left).** Adelie Penguin. **Plate 33 (right).** Antarctic Minke Whale.

Predators included the Antarctic Skua *Catharactica antarctica* and South Polar Skua *C. maccormicki* along with the reptilian Leopard Seal. Snowy Sheathbills *Chionis albus* were frequently seen; they seemed to delight in foraging in the filth of the rookeries.

The waterways of the Peninsula were splendid places in which to see whales, mainly Humpbacks and Minkes; a Southern Right Whale *Eubalaena australis* was a fresh addition to the list, while offshore Fin Whales *Balaenoptera physalus* showed occasionally. Crabeater Seals *Lobodon carcinophago* and Weddell Seals *Leptonychotes weddellii* were abundant close to the mainland and single Leopard Seals were frequent. Southern Elephant Seals *Mirounga leonine* were thinly distributed.

At the American Palmer Station on Anvers Island large aquariums enabled me to see evidence of the richness of the food chain of the sea. Ashore, invertebrate fauna was surprisingly extensive. Besides nematodes and mites, I found under moss Antarctica's largest land creature, the centimetre-long, wingless midge, *Belgica antarcticus*. The botany of the continent and the South Shetlands is almost entirely restricted to algaes, mosses, lichens and liverworts; only two vascular plants exist, a hairgrass which I found and a 'pink' which I did not.

**Plate 34.** Crab-eater Seal.

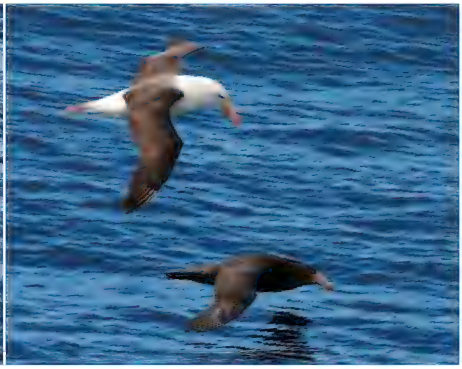

**Plate 35 (left).** Northern Giant Petrel. **Plate 36 (right).** Southern Giant Petrel with Black-browed Albatross.

Back in the early 1960s when I had last seen them, Giant Petrels formed a single species; now there are two, defined on the basis of somewhat arguable criteria. Certainly, the southern species has a much paler bill; it was usual at higher latitudes. Similarly, the 'splitters' have produced three species out of the southern race of the Great Skua ; all three - Chilean, Antarctic and South Polar - were found upon this foray southwards but I remain unconvinced about the validity of such specific determination. How long will it be before the 'lumping' fraternity reduces these five southern species back to two? However, American birders were happy to tick five new species on their 'life lists'!

The voyage of 810 miles across the stormy Scotia Sea saw Black-browed Albatross in large numbers, as well as the huge and at times ghost-like Wanderer. On one evening the ship steamed slowly through a concentration of 400 Black-brows apparently feeding on krill and other zooplankton, and here we also found the graceful Light-mantled Albatross *Phoebetria palpebrata*. Two more fresh birds for the cruise were the little Black-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregetta tropica* and the Antarctic Petrel *Thalassoica antarctica*, a large and impressive Antarctic continental breeder. The occurrence of this latter bird was unexpected and a super sighting far from its breeding areas.

**Plate 37.** Antarctic Petrel.

**Plate 38.** Chinstrap Penguin.

The mountainous and glaciated South Georgia proved to be a most spectacular place for birds, mammals and plants. Large colonies of King Penguins *Aptenodytes patagonicus* occurred in most bays. The colony in the Bay of Isles numbered at least 100,000 birds, with breeding at all stages, the noise at times deafening and the stench often quite overpowering. Cooper Bay at the south east of the mainland had four penguin species crowded around its small beach. Sitting down quietly for an hour, my back to a rock by the 'penguin motorway' to and from the beach, and watching a continuous procession of Kings, Gentoos, Chinstraps and Macaronis was enchanting. The variety and numbers of species challenged my mind about differences in feeding zones offshore and their productivity.

On the precipitous Cooper Island close by was a vast colony of breeding Black-browed Albatrosses, while in the calm sun-lit evening conditions the sea was covered with the flitting forms of prions in their thousands, an unforgettable sight. So was standing among the nesting Wandering Albatrosses on Prion Islet in the Bay of Islands with the endemic South Georgia Pipits *Anthus antarcticus* fossicking around the bases of the tussock grass under which White-chinned Petrels and prions had their nesting burrows. South Georgia Pintails *Anas georgica georgica* were frequent. Offshore, diving petrels were encountered in good numbers; specific identification of these is always difficult. Nevertheless, the experts found both the Common *Pelecanoides urinatrix* and South Georgian birds *P. georgicus*.

Southern Elephant Seals were ashore in good numbers, most in moult. The adult bulls were away at sea, while some of the younger males were jousting and allowed us a moderately close approach. The burgeoning population of Antarctic Fur Seals was evident everywhere close to the shoreline. They were also present in tussock grass between the 400 and 500 ft contours of the Coranda Peak above the remains of the Leith Harbour whaling station, while three Subantarctic Fur Seals *Arctocephalus tropicalis* were ashore on the sands of Gold Harbour. The Reindeer introduced from Norway for supplies of meat were found around the grasslands near the former whaling stations of Stromness Bay but unlike High Arctic populations, these animals were nervous and kept their distance.

**Plate 39.** Sooty Shearwater.

Throughout our time ashore in South Georgia, care had to be taken with fur seals. Mature bulls were so nervous that a charge was likely within a range of 30 yards. Once or twice a charge occurred, and a large rock or a boat's paddle was needed to dissuade the assailant. Inquisitive cows often approached but they never threatened.

Returning over the Antarctic Convergence from the Southern Ocean to the South Atlantic was indicated in more stormy weather and by the presence of Great and Sooty Shearwaters while Grey Petrels *Procellaria cinerea* and Soft-plumaged Petrels *Pterodroma mollis* showed up once we were over warmer water. The voyage between South Georgia and the Falklands produced splendid views of ghostly Wandering Albatrosses following in the ship's wake as darkness approached, along with those of a Southern Right Whale Dolphin *Lissodelphis peronii* and numbers of Peale's Dolphins *Lagenorhynchus australis* and Dusky Dolphins *L. obscurus*.

A visit of 24 hours to Bleaker Island and to East Falkland itself was enough to demonstrate how spectacular the Falklands are for wildlife. Bleaker is a fairly large, offshore, southerly island, inevitably with many sheep on impoverished pasture and dwarf shrub heathland. Birds were in profusion: Upland and Kelp Geese, the rare Ruddy-headed Goose *Chloephaga rubidiceps*, Falkland Island Flightless Steamer Ducks *Tachyeres brachypterus*, Crested Ducks, Magellanic Snipe *Gallinago magellanica*, Rufous-chested Dotterel *Charadrius modestus*, Two-banded Plover *C. falklandicus,* two species of

**Plate 40. (a)** Crested Duck. **(b)** Falkland Steamer Duck. **(c)** Brown-hooded Gull. **(d)** Kelp Gull.

Oystercatcher, Turkey Vultures *Cathartes aura*, and Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*. Passerines included Dark-faced Ground Tyrants *Muscisaxicola maclovianus*, Black-chinned Siskins *Spinus barbata*, Correndera Pipits *Anthus correndera* and Blackish Cinclodes *Cinclodes antarctica*. Three species of gull were present, one of them new to me - the Dolphin Gull *Larus scoresbii* which was attractively colourful. Seabird nesting colonies on the low cliff tops included Blue-eyed Cormorant and two species of penguin, the burrowing nesting Magellanic *Spheniscus magellanicus* and the diminutive Rockhopper *Eudyptes chrysocomes* with its neat, yellow head plumes. The local population of the Rockhopper was said to be in decline, the evidence suggesting excessive fishing to be the cause. As I departed Bleaker to return to the ship in the evening, the sky appeared to be full of flighting cormorants, gulls and sheldgeese.

There was so much of interest in Stanley that I took an ornithological rest. Nonetheless, a Rufous-backed Negrito *Lessonia rufa*, a family of Flightless Steamer Ducks and the ubiquitous House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* provided a pleasing farewell to South American birds.

With the exception of those parts of our route in which the ship engaged well southwards to the Crystal Sound beyond the Antarctic Circle and skirting the north western part of the Weddell Sea, the programme of *World Discoverer* is now well used by numbers of cruising companies to the Antarctic. During my own visit down South I saw 42 species of seabirds along with an absorbing array of some 30 South American and South Georgian land birds, 16 species of marine mammals, reindeer and numbers of special polar invertebrates and plants. My major problem had been finding time to rest and sleep, but the long flight back to the UK sorted that problem out. I have enjoyed many geography and natural history trips to other parts of the world; this one was superb.

Nevertheless, my time in Port Stanley had some sad moments. I was walking back into the town from the Falkland Islands Museum in Britannia House out to the west of the settlement and came upon the Liberation Monument commemorating those who had lost their lives in the war with Argentina: 130 names upon bronze plates, from the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the Merchant Navy. As I read that list, I recalled one of my sad tasks in *HMS Drake* in 1982 when I had to arrange for the next of kin and families of husbands, sons, brothers and lovers to be informed of their loss and to arrange for appropriate support. Those names came back to haunt me for a while in the cold sunshine. However, it didn't last long, for the proprietor of the Upland Goose, Mr French, having noted my name tag, would not accept any payment for my pint of bitter and the ship then returned to a better keel!

***Tony Norris, 20 Wallington Shore Road, Wallington Village***
***Fareham, Hants PO16 8SL. Tel: 01329 239540***

**Plate 41.** View over the north end of the isle from the Main Light, with the Low Light (Isle of May Bird Obs.) on the right.

# RNBWS participates in bird recording work on the Isle of May, 13–20 May 2017

by HI Scott

*(All photographs by the author unless credited otherwise)*

*The author, who lives near Aberdeen, is a life-long amateur ornithologist, keen bird photographer and the designer of* Sea Swallow. *Having first stayed in the Isle of May Bird Observatory as a schoolboy, he now visits the Isle of May each spring to assist with bird recording work.*

In the 2015 issue of *Sea Swallow* my colleague Mark Newell wrote about the seabird monitoring work that has been on-going for forty years on the Isle of May, an island that also hosts the oldest continuously run bird observatory in the UK. I usually spend a week at the observatory each spring with my friend Ian Halliday (Hal), and this year we invited three fellow RNBWS members (Steve Copsey, Mark Cutts and Tony Tindale, aka 'The Three Amigos') to join us. This was a first for RNBWS and one I hope will be repeated.

**Plate 42.** The Low Light residents (left–right); Harry Scott, Steve Copsey, Ian Halliday, Tony Tindale and Mark Cutts..

**Plate 43. (a)** View over the south end of the isle from Main Light. **(b)** Main Light. **(c)** 'The Three Amigos' scanning the Top Trap, Main Light garden area. **Plate 44 (opposite).** Incubating Shag.

## Saturday 13 May

We arrived on the island on a day with great promise. Conditions were ideal for grounding migrants and the previous day had already seen the arrival of a stunning male Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* and Eastern Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans albistriata* amongst a scattering of other migrant species. By the time of our arrival in early afternoon, the easterly winds, rain showers and poor visibility had produced a big fall of migrants; the island was alive with birds. Hal and Mark set off without delay for the Heligoland 'Top Trap' in the walled garden of the replacement lighthouse, the Main Light, near the highest point of the island to begin ringing. They were delighted to find six birds in the trap and got right down to work. A total of 27 new birds from the various traps were ringed that day, the last being a very smart Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*. Meanwhile, Tony, Steve and I searched for the Red-breasted Flycatcher without success but on a walk round the island saw a good variety of migrants including hirundines, warblers, pipits, flycatchers and several chats.

## Sunday 14 May

A dry day but cloudy with blustery winds until the late afternoon when it became clear and sunny. Twenty birds were trapped, rather less than the day before and indeed the whole island seemed quieter. The highlight for Tony and Steve was the sighting on distant rocks of a male Goosander *Mergus goosander*, a bird that is usually only recorded flying past the island. Four Tree Pipits *Anthus trivialis* in the scrub around the Main Light were another highlight amongst plenty of other wildlife including Grey Seals *Halichoerus grypus* and several species of butterflies and moths. Tony relocated the island's portable moth trap to our Low Light Observatory accommodation where he ran it each evening during the rest of our stay.

**Plate 45.** Ringed Roseate Tern (top right) amongst Arctic Terns roosting in Kirkhaven.

## Monday 15 May

This was a rather dreary day, weather-wise, with rain most of the day. By now it was obvious that no new migrants had arrived with just three new birds ringed all day. However, Steve and Tony encountered plenty of birds as they undertook their twice-daily tour of the island, plus many seals, and back at the moth trap there was a good variety of moths to keep them occupied. The highlight of the day though, was the discovery of a Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* among the Arctic Terns *S. paradisdaea* roosting near the Kirkaven jetty. Having spooked several times, we all eventually enjoyed very good views of this beautiful bird before it departed later in the day.

## Tuesday 16 May

An overcast but dry day with sunny spells developing later. Hal and I went off to photograph the numerous breeding seabirds, while Mark put out spring traps loaded with Mori worms which helped greatly in getting the ringing total up to five new birds for the day. Steve and Tony again circumnavigated the island, noting a single Curlew *Numenius arquata* and two Purple Sandpipers *Calidiris maritima* as they did, but generally it was very quiet. Later in the day Steve took advantage of the brighter conditions and headed off with his camera to get some good shots of breeding seabirds. One highlight, though rather distant, was a Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* feeding on what looked like an Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica*, with a Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* attempting to get in on the action; very reminiscent, said Steve, of Cape Petrels *Daption capense* stealing morsels from Giant Petrels *Macronectes giganteus* down south.

**Plate 46.** Great Black-backed Gull feeding on presumed Atlantic Puffin with Fulmar in attendance. © *Steve Copsey.*
**Plate 47 (opposite). a)** Common Tern. **b)** Guillemot. **c)** Fulmars. **d)** Black-legged Kittiwake. **e)** Atlantic Puffin. **f)** Razorbill.

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

f)

## Wednesday 17 May

A dry and bright day with very good visibility throughout. Today we made a big effort with the Heligoland traps; spring traps and two mist nets were also erected in the scrub next to the observatory but just seven birds were ringed as a result. Tony and Steve came upon a Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* early in the day, followed by the discovery of a female Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* in the grounds around Main Light. Unfortunately for the ringers it never obliged by entering the Heligoland trap. Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* were again on the move and sightings of two Peregrines *Falco peregrinus* added a bit of drama when Steve tried to string them into Gyrs *Falco rusticolus*. The sighting of a deflated celebratory 18th birthday balloon floating close inshore, among the rafts of seabirds and a group of Grey Seals, was a sad sight and totally out of place in this stunning island reserve.

## Thursday 18 May

A day of good weather but rather bleak from a ringing point of view, with only three birds ringed. Nevertheless, there were good sightings of Curlews flying in from the north, and a passing Peregrine with a tern kill provided Hal with a good photo opportunity. Two more species were added to the moth list, while offshore we watched Grey Seals and an unidentified Dolphin sp.

## Friday 19 May

The day was calm and overcast, with the occasional break in the cloud before rain arrived in the early evening.

**Plate 48 (opposite).** Female Common Eider incubating her clutch just outside the Observatory door.
**Plate 49 (above). a)** Black Redstart. **b)** Wheatear. **c)** Grey Seals.

**Plate 50 (left).** Puffin in moth trap. © *Steve Copsey*. **Plate 51 (right).** Hawfinch.

## Saturday 20 May

The morning started much as normal, with Steve up at about 04.30 to catch the sunrise, followed by Mark who as usual complained that this was far too early. They both headed for the moth trap, only to find it contained a very oversize moth-like Puffin! This woke the rest of us up, and the Puffin too! Up to that point, it had been very calm so Steve quickly released it and it took to the air heading straight for the sea.

We were now all thinking the same thing; how long had it been in the moth trap and had the light affected its vision? We had concerns as the bird headed for open water, since there was a very large rock in its flight path, but all were relieved to see it make the necessary adjustment and avoid the rock landing safely on the sea a few hundred metres offshore.

Following that excitement, we set off on our early morning tour of the island in the wet and overcast conditions but found no new arrivals, so we set about packing our gear and tidying the observatory in readiness for our return to the mainland. Around breakfast time, I received a phone call from Mark Newell and promptly gathered the troops. But without divulging what we were going to see, we headed off to the ringing hut where Hal tentatively put his hand in a bird bag that Mark had waiting for us. Hal pulled out a rather fine male Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* - what an excellent way to end our week!

A great week it certainly was; we recorded good numbers of breeding and passage birds; mammals, moths and butterflies too, making a good contribution to the Observatory's records. It was also a very happy week, with lots of laughs and shared experiences as well as some dedicated hard work too of course!

This article is just a précis of our full trip report which has been submitted to the Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust (*isleofmaybirdobs.org*), but it can also be accessed via the RNBWS website. As I said at the beginning, this was a first for RNBWS but I sincerely hope it will not be the last, so please email me if you'd like to register an interest to join us on the Isle of May during the spring of 2018.

***Harry Scott***
*Email: picades@ifb.co.uk*

**Plate 52.** Islet of Boveray.

# Saint Kilda: looking in your own back yard

by Major P Carr RM
*(Photographs by the author)*

There is a saying that goes along the lines of "don't go searching all around the world until you have looked at what is in your own back yard". I never really took that in, for although I have always appreciated the beauty and the birds of the UK most of my birding has been overseas, and in the three years since retirement have focused on oceanic islands and seabirds - open wooden boats in the Humboldt Current off Peru, inflatable boats around the sub-Antarctic islands of New Zealand and Australia, taking passage on a former Russian research ship in the southwest Pacific, and cruising onboard a UK Government patrol vessel in the central Indian Ocean. On these travels, aside from wanting to learn more about seabirds, I was also looking for something that I was never quite able to find or even define. This changed in 2016 when I finally did look in my own back yard and visited the St. Kilda archipelago off northwest Scotland.

Situated about 40nm WNW of North Uist, Outer Hebrides, the four oceanic islands and many sea stacs that make up the archipelago are probably the most written about small group of islands in Europe. The relationship the inhabitants had with their environment, especially the cliff-nesting seabirds, has been the subject of many books and academic papers, and the permanent evacuation of the entire population in 1930 was covered by the national media at the time. However, all this was news to me and the only thing I knew about the place was from a friend of mine who had seen a Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* there in 1977. This all changed when I started reading and researching the area in preparation for a visit in August 2016.

I now know that the archipelago is a UK National Nature Reserve, a European Community Special Protection Area and one of only 25 UNESCO dual World Heritage Sites in the world (that is to say, they qualify for both cultural and natural history reasons). I learned that the main island that was inhabited is not called St. Kilda but Hirta; that the archipelago is famous for two breeds of very hardy sheep named after two of the other islands, Boreray and Soay. I learned too that there is an endemic sub-species of Long-tailed Field Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus hirtensis* and of House Mouse *Mus musculus muralis*, the latter now extinct after the evacuation of *Homo sapiens*. There is also the St. Kilda Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes hirtensis*, which is slightly larger and paler than the one we know on mainland UK.

However, seabirds were the purpose of my visit.

Britain and Ireland's seabird populations are globally significant, holding just under 8 million seabirds of 25 species (for comparison the Falkland Islands holds just over 4 million of 22 species). Of these, and putting its importance in context, the St. Kilda archipelago hosts about 20% of the North Atlantic population of Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus*, and around 20% of the world population of the *grabae* race of Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica*. It has the largest colony of Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* in western Europe, the largest colony of Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* in the eastern Atlantic and the largest colony of European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* in the UK. Put simply, St. Kilda is a seabird mecca.

Being armed with the above facts and figures prior to arrival does not in any way prepare you for what is to come when visiting in the late breeding season. My day trip to St. Kilda was via an oceangoing powerboat running out of Uig on the Isle of Skye (see www.gotostkilda.co.uk). This way of getting to the islands does not afford much opportunity for safe and dry birding en route but it was surprisingly comfortable and really fast.

On entering Village Bay, the ancient and still used landing site on Hirta, the eerie feeling of desolation and a lost way of life is all pervading, in spite of the horrible recently erected MOD buildings (that do not appear in the tourist brochures!). The half-cylindrical stone cleats that cover the island's slopes, used by the long-gone islanders to store harvested seabirds and grain looked like military defences. The crumbling dry stone walls and line of deserted crofts gave a feeling of a Hitchcock scene where bad things were about to happen.

**Plate 53.** Northern Fulmar.

**Plate 54 (left).** Great Skua. **Plate 55 (right).** Great Skua.

I climbed the slope behind the village to The Gap. This col between the island high points of Oiseval and Conachair provided magnificent views across to Boreray and its two formidable sea stacs, Stac an Armin and Stac Lee, with views of the once connected island of Dun whose hillsides seemed to be swarming with bees. It also provided me with the thrilling experience of being amongst breeding skuas. Both Great *Catharacta skua* and Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* breed on the barren slopes above Village Bay and their fearless dive-bombing was an exhilarating photographic experience. The tameness of the breeding Northern Fulmars on the ledges below and their constant aerial to and froing from their breeding sites using the thermals produced by the dramatic cliffs to rise up all around me was also a memory to hold.

**Plate 56.** Village Bay, Hirta.

**Plate 57.** Northern Gannets.

But it was not Hirta, with its moving history, lost culture, barren and stark hillsides and television moment birdlife that provided the lasting memories and it was not Hirta that showed me what I had been looking for in my pelagic wanderings.

The trip back to Uig was preceded by a slow and very up-close-and-personal tour of Dun and the two immense sea stacs off Boreray. Cruising along the coast of Dun I realised that the swarming bees I had seen from Hirta were in fact thousands upon thousands of Atlantic Puffins flying back and forth from feeding grounds around St. Kilda to feed their near-fledged chicks.

It was these two sea stacs that gave me the feeling of, "wow this is it"! Northern Gannets were dropping like arrow-headed boulders into the ocean all around; three species of auk were porpoising in our boat's wake, Black-legged Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* were deafening from the nearby ledges and true ocean wanderers such as Leach's Storm-petrels and Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* could be seen gliding over the wave tops. Not 20 metres away the monolithic, towering structures of the two stacs bursting skyward from the ocean depths showed blinding white lines of breeding Northern Gannets in the fault lines of the rocks and the accompanying munitions factory stench of their excrement brought together all I love of the outdoors: oceans, seabirds and mountains. I had been looking for this place for many a year; I had travelled thousands of miles in all sorts of maritime and mountain modes of transport looking for it, and there it was all the time, in my own backyard.

***Peter Carr***
*Email: petecarr1@hotmail.com*

**Plate 58.** *HMS Echo.*

# *HMS Echo* and the Mediterranean

by Lt PR Boak RN

*(Photographs by the author)*

From November 2016 to August 2017, *HMS Echo* operated in the central Mediterranean as part of *Operation Sophia*, the European Union's effort to tackle illegal immigration and disrupt the activities of migrant smugglers. During this period the ship helped to save thousands of lives, destroyed numerous craft involved in illegal migration, and gathered useful intelligence in a bid to prevent the human smuggling.

The core mission area for *Operation Sophia* lay in international waters off the Libyan coast, and this placed *Echo* in an unrivalled position to observe migrating birds originating from the African mainland. Many species used the ship as a temporary pit-stop; for others, the exertion proved too much, with the ship providing their final resting place. In addition to birds, numerous marine species were sighted, including turtles. dolphins, tuna and swordfish. Aside from contributing to the scientific databases, the wildlife sightings provided welcome respite from the often incredibly demanding operational work *Echo* was involved in.

***Philip Boak***
*Email: swordfish200@aol.com*

**Plate 59 (overleaf). (a)** Turtle Dove. **(b)** Common Kestrel. **(c)** Quail. **(d)** Common Sandpiper. **(e)** Yellow Wagtail. **(f)** Pied Flycatcher. **(g)** Tree Pipit. **(h)** Chiffchaff.

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

f)

g)

h)

**Plate 60.** Palm Warbler.

# Landbirds at sea in the Atlantic, Caribbean and Pacific, including a major fall off Panama

by S Cook

*(Photographs by the author; Latin names of birds are listed in the Appendices)*

In May 1963 Alan L Durand reported on a remarkable fall of American landbirds on the *RMS Mauretania*, en route from New York to Southampton in October 1962 (*British Birds*, vol 56, No. 5). Ten years later, in the same journal, he published further records and a summary of his North Atlantic voyages. Regarding the anticipation and excitement of seeing landbirds at sea, I can do no better than to quote him, "Looking back over nearly five years of North Atlantic voyaging, the sheer unpredictability of landbirds at sea provided a constant excitement in this incongruous setting. An important legacy of these travels is a vivid awareness of the huge size of the stage for this ornithological drama and an appreciation of the complexities of time, distance and weather that will always vary, and vary enormously, the incidence of species and numbers on a particular voyage."

Seeing landbirds at sea is a particular passion of mine too - in addition to seeing as many seabirds, marine mammals and other forms of wildlife as possible, of course. If I am able, I will often choose a particular cruise contract for the opportunity to see either birds aboard the ship or from the ship itself. Regarding the latter, for example, I have seen very many but I was once lucky enough to see my first Amazonian Umbrellabird from an ocean-going vessel.

During the autumn of 2016 my excellently-appointed expedition cruise ship, *MV Silver Explorer*, took me from St. John, New Brunswick, Canada on 29 September to Valparaiso, Chile, where I disembarked on 14 November (see daily itinerary, Appendix A). On the way, it visited the eastern USA, the Bahamas, Cuba, Caribbean Colombia, Panama, transited the Panama Canal and

**Plate 61.** Sooty Shearwater.

then went on to Pacific Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and northern Chile. During the latter part of our time in the USA we were at first diverted and then had to terminate the cruise in Philadelphia because of hurricane Matthew. The ship had been due to sail down the coast as far as Savanna, Georgia, before heading across to the Bahama Islands.

The ship carried inflatable Zodiacs, for boat cruising and for landing at wild and remote places. In addition to many exciting destinations, there would also be excellent opportunities to see a wide variety of wildlife.

In addition to the landbirds that I saw on the ship, I also found some seabirds aboard too: a Leach's Storm-petrel, found dead on deck, St. John, New Brunswick, Canada on 29 September, Cory's Shearwater, Newport, Rhode Island, USA, on 1 October, Sooty Shearwater, 9 nm west of Matarani, southern Peru, on 7 November and Hornby's Storm-petrel at Antofagasta, northern Chile, on 10 November. The shearwaters and the last storm-petrel were all released successfully.

I had previously (in the autumn) been off eastern North America twice and through the Caribbean several times so I knew that large numbers of small migrating birds landing on the ship was a distinct and exciting possibility. All I needed was the right weather and the ability to get by on a lot less sleep than usual; deck patrols during the hours of darkness were a pre-requisite. During the time that the ship was off the USA the wind was predominantly brisk and from the northeast, which would not encourage migrants to come out to sea. My landbird observations were fitted in around many other activities, such as lectures, Zodiac cruising, shore excursions and seabird surveys for the RNBWS.

**Plate 62.** Hornby's Storm-petrel.

However, despite a very high level of anticipation, 2016 was to be, initially at least, somewhat disappointing. When the ship was in the Atlantic and the Caribbean there was just a sprinkling of birds on board at any one time (see Appendix B) or flying by (see Appendix C). Nevertheless, it was my habit on virtually every day at sea to rise before daylight to check the decks for birds, to spend as much time as possible during the day out on deck and to do another deck patrol after dark and before going to bed. Previous trips had shown that night migrants will come aboard before daylight, others will arrive shortly after daybreak and yet more could arrive on board at any time during the day. Constant vigilance was needed!

## Spectacular fall of migrants

After three weeks on the ship I was ready to accept that there would be no great fall of birds, so on our last evening in the Caribbean, I decided that it would be safe to enjoy a long, relaxing meal in the restaurant with guests. During that afternoon though, when we were at the San Blas Islands, Panama, there had been some heavy rain. From my Zodiac I had seen a Chimney Swift fly over the ship and a Prothonotary Warbler flying around the stern. So before dining and just to be on the safe side, I went out on deck for one quick last look around. I found a Palm Warbler aboard and saw several small birds flying around the ship. Many previous nights had been cloudless and moonlit but it was still overcast and wet - perfect conditions for a fall! Abandoning plans for a leisurely meal I grabbed a very quick bite to eat in the crew mess and rushed back outside.

The ship was en route from Perro Grande, San Blas Islands, (9.6N, 78.5W) to the city of Colon (9.4N, 79.9W), at the Caribbean entrance to the Panama Canal. We were between 12 and 95 nm offshore. There was lots of lightning and rain but not much wind. At 20.00 it was NNW, 10 knots, at midnight N, 8 knots, and at 04.00 E, 5 kts. From the first few birds in the early evening numbers built up steadily until a few hours later there was a blizzard of small birds flying around the ship, illuminated by the lights. It was an extraordinary spectacle. More and more birds landed on the decks, railings, and boats and there seemed to be birds everywhere. The peak of activity was at 02.00, after which numbers fell sharply. In all I was out on deck continuously from 19.30 on 22 October until 04.00 the next morning, when birds had virtually stopped landing on the ship and many had left. It was the best 8½ hours that I had on the ship!

I had access to parts of the outer deck where many birds landed and took refuge but there were other areas that could not be reached without permission (the bow, because it was unlit) or because of a health risk (the upperworks below the radars). However, the promenade deck enabled a complete circuit to be made and was mostly open. Near the lifeboats there were enclosed sections of companionway, with sheltered pipes and ledges on which birds could land. At the stern was the outside bar, open deck area and two hot tubs enclosed by glass screens. On the deck above was the lifeboat muster area, forward of which was where the Zodiacs were stacked. All these areas soon became full of birds.

Walking around the decks it was not possible to count accurately either the number of birds or the number of species, and of the total number of birds seen, those aboard represented probably only a small percentage. In total, several thousand birds must have been attracted to the lights in the dark and wet weather and there could easily have been up to a thousand birds on board. Counting them was difficult and identifying them was not always so easy either. Those with a distinctive plumage or structure such as the Prothonotary Warbler or Rose-breasted Grosbeak were easy but many female/immature warblers looked very similar. Even with a field guide, a few birds remained un-named and were only identified from photographs that I subsequently sent to birders in the USA.

Many of the birds were oblivious to my presence so I was able to get very close views. One bird that looked distinctly out of place was the Sora, which although wary of my movement, did walk around out in the open. At times, because of the number of birds on the deck and railings, plus those in flight looking for somewhere to land, I had to walk very slowly and carefully to complete my circuit of the decks. However, all but one or two birds survived their ordeal and nearly all of them had gone by daybreak. By 08.30, when the ship docked in Colon, all I could find was an injured Bay-breasted Warbler and two Prothonotary Warblers.

**Plate 63. (a)** Great Blue Heron. **(b)** Green Heron. **(c)** Cattle Egret.

During the night, I identified an astonishing 35 species aboard the ship, no fewer than 20 of which were warblers (see Appendix D). The most prevalent species - several hundred - was the Bay-breasted Warbler, with the impressive Prothonotary Warbler not far behind. The next most numerous was the Common Yellowthroat but with only about 20 individuals noted. Why two species should number in the hundreds whilst the other 33 had only a few individuals is a mystery. This is something that I have witnessed before though, with Palm Warblers and Common Yellowthroats once in the majority. Green Herons liked to hide in corners but one or two seemed to favour hand rails and the tops of the glass screens, right out in the open. One normally thinks of Ovenbirds as skulking, ground-dwelling birds so it was a surprise to see one perched for some minutes on a guy rope between deck parasols. The only Wilson's Warbler that I saw unexpectedly landed on my camera as I was walking around and it reminded me of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak that did the same thing in 1996. Thrushes and orioles, birds that I have seen before on ships were noticeably absent this time.

In addition, I heard a Greater Yellowlegs calling and, in flight, identified a *Catharus* thrush species by its size and underwing pattern, saw four Cattle or Snowy Egrets and a single Common or Lesser Nighthawk. Once through the Panama Canal and into the North Pacific, against expectations, more migrating landbirds were recorded - see Appendix E. By the time that I disembarked in Valparaiso I had identified no less than 45 species of landbird aboard the ship. See Appendix F for the additional ten species that were seen aboard in the Atlantic and Pacific.

During my six weeks on board the ship I was lucky enough to travel with lots of interesting and well-travelled people and was able to go ashore at many different and exciting places, drive the Zodiacs up a river, in bays and around seabird and sea lion islands, observe thousands of marine mammals and see many different species of birds. However, the undoubted highlight was the privilege of being able to witness the long-distance migration of small birds from North America to Central and South America.

**Appendix A.** Daily itinerary.

**29 September**, join *MV Silver Explorer* in St. John, New Brunswick, Canada; sail midday
**30 September**, Portland, Maine, USA
**1 October**, Newport, Rhode Island
**2 October**, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts
**3 October**, New York City, New York
**4 October**, at sea off southern New Jersey, Delaware Bay, Chesapeake & Delaware Canal, Chesapeake Bay to Baltimore, Maryland
**5 October**, Washington, DC
**6 October**, Norfolk, Virginia
**7 October**, requested to leave Norfolk due to Hurricane Matthew, sailed late afternoon for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
**8–10 October**, Philadelphia, sailed at 19.00, 10/10 for the Bahama Islands
**11–13 October**, at sea, arrived Nassau, Bahamas, 17.30, 13/10
**14 October**, at sea en route to Cuba via Straits of Florida
**15 October**, arrive Havana, Cuba 12.00
**16 October**, Havana, depart early evening
**17 October**, at sea off western Cuba
**18 October**, Cienfuegos, Cuba
**19–20 October**, at sea en route to Colombia
**21 October**, arrive Cartagena, Colombia 07.00, depart early evening
**22 October**, at sea, arrive Perro Grande, San Blas Islands, Panama, 12.00, depart early evening. Night of the big fall on the ship
**23 October**, docked in Colon, Panama
**24 October**, Panama Canal transit, 06.15–16.45
**25 October**, village visit, Mogue River, Panama
**26 October**, Bahia Solano and Utria National Park, Colombia
**27 October**, Utria NP, Colombia, depart mid-afternoon; at sea
**28 October**, at sea off Colombia
**29 October**, Isla de la Plata and Machala, Ecuador
**30 October**, Machala for Buenaventura Reserve, Ecuador
**31 October**, Guayaquil, Ecuador
**1 November**, at sea off northern Peru
**2 November**, Isla Lobos de Tierra and at sea, Peru
**3 November**, Salaverry and Isla Guanape, Peru
**4 November**, at sea, arrive Callao for Lima late morning
**5 November**, Paracas and Islas Ballestas, Peru
**6 November**, at sea off southern Peru
**7 November**, Matarani, Peru
**8 November**, Arica, Chile for Lauca National Park
**9 November**, at sea
**10 November**, Antofagasta for San Pedro de Atacama, Chile
**11 November**, morning at sea to Isla Pan de Azucar, Chile
**12 November**, morning at sea to Isla Chañaral Penguin Reserve, Chile
**13 November**, Coquimbo for Elqui Valley, Chile
**14 November**, early morning arrival and disembarkation at Valparaiso, Chile

**Appendix B.** Species aboard prior to and after the big fall - North Atlantic & Caribbean (species in **bold** type are ones not previously recorded by me on board a ship).

**3 October**
Common Yellowthroat, *Geothlypis trichas*. One fem/imm 7 nm S of Long Island, NY at 04.30
**4 October**
Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia*. One at 05.00, 9 nm off southern New Jersey, wind ENE 19 knots
White-throated Sparrow, *Zonotrichia atricapilla*. One adult in various places, 13.00–17.15
Winter Wren, *Troglodytes hiemalis*. One 18 nm E of Cape May, New Jersey, wind NE, 25 knots.
**Brown Thrasher**, *Toxostoma rufum*. One seen briefly at 15.33
Black-throated Green Warbler, *Setophaga virens*. One male, 15.35–18.10
**11 October**
**Marsh Wren**, *Cistothorus palustris*. One at 37.2N, 74.6W, wind NNE, 19 kts,
Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia*. One from 11.12–16.30
**12 October**
Palm Warbler, *Setophaga palmaru*. One at 05.15 & 07.30
Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia*. One at 07.30 at 32° 14′ N, 075° 17′ W, wind NE, 22 kts
**13 October**
Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia*. One at 07.10 just off the pilot station, Nassau, Bahamas
**14 October**
Palm Warbler, *Setophaga palmarum*, Four to eight, 15.54–18.15 at 25.2N 79.8W, Straits of Florida. 2 found roosting on the ship (near-full moon)
Common Yellowthroat, *Geothlypis trichas*. One female/immature. at 16.57 at 25N 79.9W
American Redstart, *Setophaga ruticilla*. One female/immature. found roosting
**15 October:** 06.00 at 23.5N 81.9W, 18 nm N of Cuba, approaching Havana, big moon and lightning
Common Yellowthroat, *Geothlypis trichas*. One female/immature
Blackburnian Warbler, *Setophaga fusca*. One female
Palm Warbler, *Setophaga palmarum*. Up to five; one caught by me in the gymnasium and released
**20 October**
Magnolia Warbler, *Setophaga magnolia*. One seen briefly just before a
Northern Parula, *Setophaga Americana*. One at 17.05 at 12.3N 76.8W
**22 October**
Yellow-billed Cuckoo, *Coccyzus americanus*. One tired bird seen 06.31–42 from 9.8N 78.1W. I tried to catch it but it flew off. Reported on a guest balcony at 14.50 - tried again to catch it but it dropped down to the sea. I ran to the gangway, jumped into a Zodiac and rescued the bird, which was released (very tired) in a Colon, Panama car park the next morning.

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

f)

g)

h)

**Appendix C.** Species seen in flight only - North Atlantic & Caribbean (in addition to the birds on the ship, the following flew past or around it).

4 October
Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura*. One flew past at 07.17 off southern New Jersey
11 October
Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodius*. One flew past the ship at 09.38, 65 nm offshore
Palm Warbler, *Setophaga* species. One flying around the stern at 11.10
Brown Pelican, *Pelicanus occidentalis*. One immature going east at 11.28, 65 nm offshore
Palm Warbler, *Setophaga palmarum*. One seen in flight at 13.22 at 36.2N 74.5W
12 October
Warbler species, four in flight at 05.15
14 October
Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferous*. One flew high past the ship at 08.35 New Providence Channel
Warbler species, 1 flew past the front of the ship at 09.45 at 26.2N 79W
Tricoloured Heron, *Egretta tricolor*. Two at 11.40 11 nm NNW of North Bimini, Bahama Islands
Snowy/Cattle Egret, *Egretta thula/Bubulcus ibis*, five, plus two Little Blue Heron, *Egretta cerulean*
17 October
Warbler sp., One flying beside the ship at 09.40, 15 nm S of Cabo Corrientes, western Cuba
19 October
American Redstart. One fem/imm. flew by at 08.17, over the Cayman Trench, west of Jamaica
Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*. Three from 11.21–46 at 18.3N 79.4W and one at 13.59 at 17.8N, 79.3W
Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*. One at 11.29, position as above and one at 14.34 at 17.6N 79.2W
20 October
Palm? Warbler, *Setophaga* species. One in flight at just after 07.00 at approx. 13.9N, 77.8 W
Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*. One flew by from astern at 08.52 at 13.6N 77.6W
Summer Tanager, *Piranga rubra*. One female in flight from 09.25–28
Green Heron, *Butorides virescens*. One in flight from 09.25–10.33
Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodius*. Four from 10.12–50 at 13.4N 77.5W. One nearly crash-landed on my colleagues and me during an emergency drill
Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*. One from 16.05–17.40, very high initially then lower down. Flew with neck fully extended when a peregrine flew close to it
Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*. One from 17.10–14
Tanager species. One flew by at 17.59
22 October
Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*. Three from 08.28–09.48 at 09.7 78.5W, off Panama
Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodius*. Four at 08.54 at 09.7N 78.6W
Great Egret, *Ardea alba*. Three with the above species
Duck species, ca. 30 going Southeast at 08.54 and East at 09.25
Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*. Three came in to the ship and flew around, 09.07–22
From my Zodiac (ship at anchor, Pero Grande, San Blas Islands): One Prothonotary Warbler, *Protonotaria citrea*, flew around the stern and one Chimney Swift, *Chaetura pelagica*, flew over
24 October
American Robin, *Turdus migratorius* One seen on a canalside lawn, during Panama canal transit

**Appendix D.** List of species (and species totals) that landed on the ship, 22/23 October (species in bold type are ones not previously recorded by me aboard a ship).

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. One
Green Heron *Butorides virescens*. Six
**Sora** *Porzana Carolina*. One
Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*. Two
Eastern Wood Pewee *Contopus virens*. One
Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceous*.Three
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*. Four
Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorum*. Two
Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla*. Three
Northern Waterthrush *Parkesia noveboracensis*. Three
Louisiana Waterthrush *Parkesia motacilla*. One
Prothonotary Warbler *Protonotaria citrea*, 2–300
Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*. Two
**Orange-crowned Warbler** *Oreothlypis celata*. One
Tennessee Warbler *Oreothlypis peregrine*, ca. 10
Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*, ca. 20
Northern Parula *Setophaga Americana*. Two
Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia*. Three
Blackburnian Warbler *Setophaga fusca*. Three
Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata*. Two
Bay-breasted Warbler *Setophaga castanea*. 400
Palm Warbler *Setophaga palmarum*. One
Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia*. \Three
Yellow-throated Warbler *Setophaga dominica*. One
Chestnut-sided Warbler *Setophaga pensylvanica*, Six
Black-throated Green Warbler *Setophaga virens*. One
Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla*. One
**Western Tanager** *Piranga ludoviciana*. One
Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea*. One
Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra*. Four
Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*. Seven
**Painted Bunting** *Passerina ciris*. One
Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*, 10+
**Blue Grosbeak** *Passerina caerulea*. One
Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*. One

**Plate 64 (opposite). (a)** Yellow-billed Cuckoo. **(b)** Chimney Swift. **(c)** Marsh Wren. **(d)** Palm Warbler. **(e)** Blackburnian Warbler. **(f)** Black-throated Green Warbler. **(g)** Song Sparrow. **(h)** White-throated Sparrow.

**Appendix E.** Chronological list of landbirds that landed on or flew past the ship in the Pacific.

24 October

Blackburnian Warbler, *Setophaga fusca*, 1 very tired female picked up and boxed overnight at 23.00 at 08.2N, 79.4W, Gulf of Panama. (Successfully released the following day.)

Warbler species, 20–30 flying around the ship at the same time

Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*, 1 flew past the ship at the same time

25 October

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*, 2 found aboard at 04.00, 3 seen aboard at 06.00, Gulf of Panama and 9 roosting on the ship between 22.00 and 00.00

Tanager? species, one seen flying away from the ship at 06.15

Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*. Four flew past the ship at 07.00 at 08.2N, 78.4W, 7.2 nm from the nearest land (Panama)

Brown-chested Martin, *Phaeoprogne tapera*.Two aboard by the hot tubs, 22.00–00.00. 6 nm offshore

Common/Lesser Nighthawk, *Chordeiles minor/acutipennis*.Two flew past the ship, 22.00–00.00

Snowy Egret, *Egretta thula*. Three flew by, 22.00–00.00

Chimney Swift, *Chaetura pelagica*.Two on the ship (hundreds more flew past it), 22.00–00.00. One was roosting on a communications dome and I boxed the other one overnight, which I released successfully at 06.30 in Bahia Solano, Colombia.

In addition, dozens of small birds, including thrushes, flew past the ship.

28 October

Greater Yellowlegs, *Tringa melanoleuca*, 1 flying alongside the ship (speed 13 kts) at 04.45 at 3N, 79W, 45 nm W of Isla Gorgona, Colombia

small duck species. Eight - seen several times

a harrier? flew by

a flock of 5 small shorebirds

2 passerine species

29 October

Green Heron, *Butorides virescens*, 1 found on deck shortly after 05.00 at 1S, 81W, 4.4 nm W of Cabo san Lorenzo, Ecuador. It flew off at 05.48

9 November

Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*, 1 aboard, on and off, from 16.55–17.53 22 nm W of Tocopilla, Chile

12 November

Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus*, 1 flew past the ship, calling, at 10.02 at 28.7S, 71.5W

Rufous-collared Sparrow, *Zonotrichia* capensis, 2 found aboard shortly after the ship left Isla Chanaral Penguin Reserve, northern Chile from 17.11–18.05 at 29.1S, 071.6W - reported by guests as having been seen at lunchtime by the outside bar; went to roost on the Zodiacs. At 05.00 the next morning I found one awake within sight of Coquimbo, northern Chile.

**Appendix F.** The 10 additional landbird species seen on the ship, in chronological order (species in bold type are ones not previously recorded by me aboard a ship).

Winter Wren, *Troglodytes hiemalis*, 4 October, off Cape May, New Jersey

**Brown Thrasher**, *Toxostoma rufum*, ditto, off Cape May, New Jersey

White-throated Sparrow, *Zonotrichia atricapilla*, ditto, off Cape May, New Jersey

**Marsh Wren**, *Cistothorus palustris*, 11 October, 60 nm E of Cape Charles, Virginia

Song Sparrow, *Setophaga Americana*, ditto, 60 nm E of Cape Charles, Virginia, 12 October, at sea en route to the Bahama Islands, 13 October 06.45–17.04, at sea

American Redstart, *Setophaga ruticilla*, 14 October, roosting, at sea en route to Cuba

Northern Parula, *Setophaga Americana*, 20 October, at sea en route to Colombia

Brown-chested Martin, *Phaeoprogne tapera*, 25 October, at sea, Panama/Colombia

Chimney Swift, *Chaetura pelagica*, 25 October, at sea, Panama/Colombia

Rufous-collared Sparrow, *Zonotrichia capensis*, 12/13 November, at sea off Chile

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***Simon Cook***

*Email: cookbirder@hotmail.com*

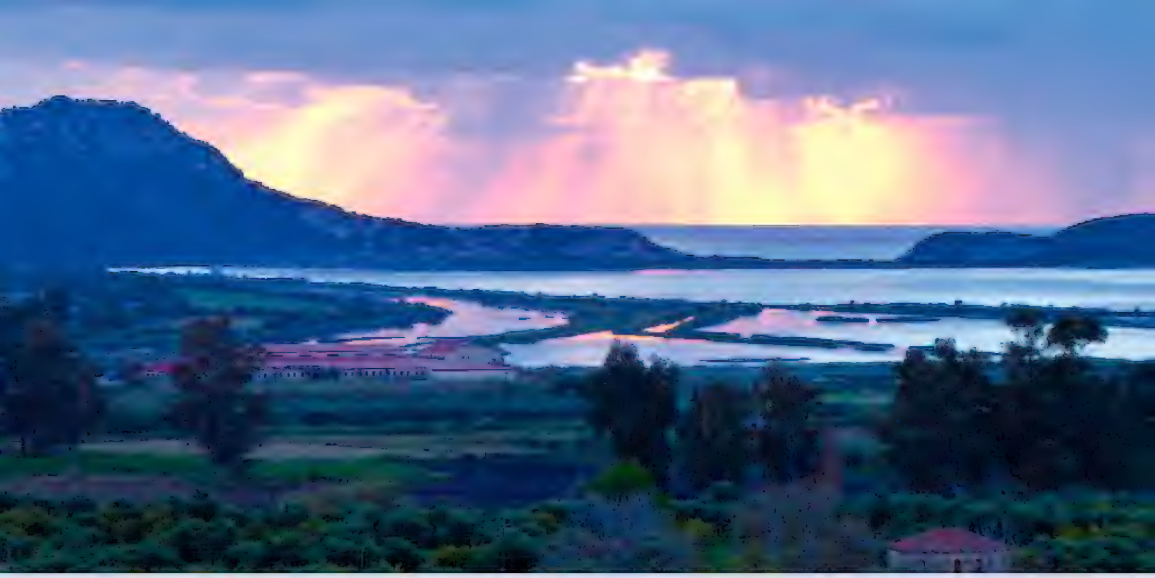

**Plate 65.** Gialova Lagoon.

# Bird watching in Navarino Bay, South West Peloponnese, Greece

by T & J Barton

*(Photographs by Jane Barton. Latin names of birds are shown in the Appendix)*

In April 2017 we spent a bird watching holiday at Navarino Bay, the scene of the last Fleet action of the sailing ship era. On 20 October 1827 Admiral Sir Edward Codrington commanded a joint British French and Russian fleet to administer a heavy defeat on the Turks and Egyptians in the Greek War of Independence.

The Gialova lagoon at the western end of Navarino Bay is a wonderful bird watching spot, particularly in the spring with the migrants passing through. Thousands of birds make the long journey across the Sahara and Mediterranean to rest and feed in this southernmost European wetland before moving on to their breeding areas.

Spring migration begins around the end of February, and during March and April thousands of waders, herons, terns, swallows, swifts, wagtails and many other passerines stop at the lagoon. Greenshanks arrive in April; Wood Sandpipers too, and these birds may number more than ten thousand over the whole spring. Last to arrive are the Turnstones and Curlew Sandpipers, which appear mostly in May. Grey Herons and Marsh Harriers are said to arrive "falling down out of the sky from somewhere very high", while some two thousand Glossy Ibis pass through the lagoon during the season. Lastly, we should mention breeding birds that can also be seen at the lagoon: Peregrine Falcons, Kestrels and many Black-winged Stilts.

We ourselves saw fifty different species in the week we spent there, mostly land and coastal birds, and the full list can be seen below. Sadly, one of the many casualties of the Greek economic crises of recent years has been the upkeep of the nature reserve on Gialova lagoon. The hides and watchtowers have been allowed to fall into disrepair and there are no wardens or volunteers. Fortunately the birds still come, but they are quite shy as shooting remains prevalent.

a)

b)

c)

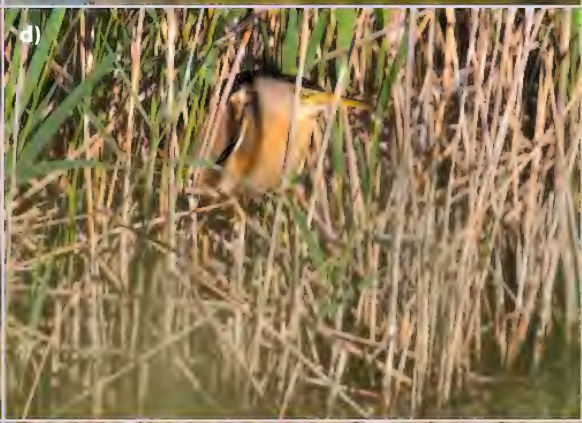
d)

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**Plate 66. (a)** Little Egret. **(b)** Night Heron. **(c)** Glossy Ibis. **(d)** Little Bittern. **(e)** Black-winged Stilt. **(f)** Squacco Heron. **(g)** Little Ringed Plover. **(h)** Wood Sandpiper. **(i)** Alpine Swift. **(j)** Woodchat Shrike. **(k)** Red-rumped Swallow. **(l)** Bee-eater.

**Appendix.** List of birds recorded at Gialova Lagoon, 18–28 April 2017.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*
Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
Buzzard *Buteo buteo*
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Cirl Bunting *Emberica cirius*
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
Coot *Fulica atra*
Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*
Crane *Grus grus*
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*
Fantail Warbler *Cisticola juncidis*
Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus*
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*
Goldfinch *Spinus tristis*
Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*
Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Greylag Goose *Anser anser*
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*
House Martin *Delichon urbicum*
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
Linnet *Liaria cannabina*
Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*
Little Egret *Egretta gazetta*
Little Stint *Calidris minuta*
Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*
Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*
Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*
Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*
Osprey *Pandion haliaetos*
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*
Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*
Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*
Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*
Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*
Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*
White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*
Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*
Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*
Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

***Tim & Jane Barton***
***Email: j.barton53@ntlworld.com***

# Amazon Notes

by Captain N Cheshire MN

*(Photographs by the author)*

In August/September 2016 I spent two weeks aboard the *Iracema*, a small expedition vessel of 26 metres based in Manaus, Brazil. The city of Manaus, with a population of two million, is a major port situated at the confluence of the Rio Negro, Rio Solimoes (Amazon) and the Rio Madeira, and is about 650 nautical miles from the Atlantic Ocean. We spent the trip exploring these rivers and their tributaries out to a hundred miles from Manaus, in particular the Jaú River and Jaú National Park and the Anavilhanas archipelago. The ship was equipped with three large canoes which allowed us to penetrate narrow creeks and the *Várzea* (flooded rain forest) in search of birds and animals. Making it all possible were our two skilled guides and the small but very efficient ship's crew. In all we located ten species of primates, Tucuxi and Amazon River (Pink) Dolphins *Inia geofrensis*, various rodents, Giant Otter, 277 bird species, Caymans, assorted reptiles and many butterflies and insects.

These are the seabirds we saw:

**Plate 67.** Large-billed Tern, 30 Aug 2016, Marchanteria Is, nr. Manaus.

**Neotropic Cormorant**
*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*
The range of the Neotropic Cormorant extends from the southern United States through Central America and South America and is the only species of cormorant in the River Amazon basin. I saw it every day and it was particularly numerous along the Rio Negro and in the Anavilhanas archipelago where there were large roosts in riverside trees.

**Large-billed Tern**
*Phaetusa simplex*
The Large-billed Tern's range is most of South America east of the Andes and north of Argentina, along large rivers where it breeds, with some non-breeders frequenting the coast. It is an unusual tern with a very heavy yellow bill and an upper wing pattern similar to Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*. I saw it most days, often roosting on sandbars or feeding by plunge-diving. On two occasions I saw it skimming for prey like *R. niger*.

**Yellow-billed Tern**
*Sternula superciliaris*
The Yellow-billed Tern is part of the worldwide Little Tern *S. albifrons* superspecies and is endemic to South America. The species distribution is similar to the Large-billed. I saw the species most days, usually single birds feeding or small groups roosting in trees on river islands.

**Black Skimmer**
*Rhynchops niger*
There are three species of skimmer, the Black Skimmer being the Neotropical representative distributed from the United States through Central and South America. I saw a few of these striking and interesting birds during the trip and on one exceptional morning observed about 300 on the extensive sand flats of Marchanteria Island near Manaus.

***Neil Cheshire***
*Email: diomedea1@bigpond.com*

**Plate 68.** Yellow-billed Tern, 3 Sept 2016, Jaú River nr. Manaus.

**Plate 69.** Black Skimmer, 30 Aug 2016, Marchanteria Is. nr Manaus.

**Plate 70.** Neotropical Cormorant, 7 Sept 2016, Rio Negro nr. Manaus, Brazil.

**Plate 71.** Amazon River Dolphin *Inia geoffrensis.*

**Plate 72.** Peregrine Falcon. © *S Cook*

# Peregrine Falcons & Gyr Falcons at sea

by S Cook

Peregrine Falcons, *Falco peregrinus* are probably one of the most frequently seen species of falcon at sea, especially during periods of bird migration. Their larger relative, the Gyr Falcon, *Falco rusticolus* is not seen nearly so often, although it too seems attracted to ships. This note summarises recent personal sightings at sea for both.

## Peregrine Falcons

All of the peregrine sightings were made from the expedition cruise ship *Silver Explorer*, which I joined in St. John, New Brunswick, Canada on 29 September 2016 and left in Valparaiso, Chile on 14 November.

**11 October.** Our first sighting of a peregrine was at sea, 60 nm NE of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, at 35.8N, 74.5W. This was a very dark and streaky immature bird that passed close to the ship, showing a full crop.

**15 October.** At 0915, six miles north of Havana, Cuba, at 23.3N, 82.2W, we spotted a bird with a full crop as it flew south past the ship towards the city. Later in the day I saw what was possibly the same bird, flying over the sea-facing Hotel Nacional.

**18 October.** Peregrine migration in the Caribbean was heralded by an immature bird that flew close past the ship just before we left Cienfuegos, Cuba for Cartagena, Colombia.

**20 October.** The first of several peregrines was seen at 0700, when two distant birds were spotted, 245 nm NW of Cartagena (13.9N, 77.8W). Later, I ate lunch on deck and was rewarded with close views of an immature bird, in position 9N, 77.3W. In the middle of the afternoon, when 160 nm NW of Cartagena, two adults flew close past the ship, heading south. A few minutes later, at

1517, an immature bird flew past but turned and after flying around for a few minutes perched on top of the mast. At 1545 it was in the air high above us and it landed again at 1626. I noticed that it now had a full crop and feathers on its beak - signifying an aerial meal. It was frightened away at 1635 when the bo'sun started up the engine of one of our inflatables. However, it was back on the mast at 1650 and I last saw it at 1658 when it flew off strongly to the SSE, towards Cartagena.

During the course of the day, which ended with a superb sunset and a green flash, it had been very interesting to log six different peregrines, all of which I would guess originated in north-eastern North America, with their last landfall either Cuba or adjacent Hispaniola.

**Plate 73.** Peregrine Falcon. © *S Cook*

**22 October.** The day after leaving Cartagena for the San Blas Islands, Panama, I was again out on deck, the sky heavily overcast, with lightning and heavy rain to the south. Here I had my last sighting of Caribbean peregrines, at 0846 in position 9.8N, 78.5W, when on the approach to the islands I saw three different birds.

**28 October.** Our first Pacific peregrine: one adult at sea off the west coast of Colombia at 1817 at 0.5N, 80.4W, 18.5 nm offshore. The same, or another bird, was seen on the mast at 2300; it took off, flew away into the darkness and soon returned to the mast with a small bird in its talons.

**29 October.** One immature bird was seen flying alongside the ship at 0500 at 01S, 81.0W, 4.4 nm off Cabo San Lorenzo, Ecuador. It was seen again in flight at 0526 and it was on the mast at 0544. It took off at 0550 and was seen in flight until 0619, when it was lost to sight.

**31 October.** Shortly after leaving the dock at Guayaquil in the early evening, a colleague saw a peregrine catch a bat that had come out of its roost in the adjacent mangroves.

**3 November.** A presumed North American migrant peregrine was seen intermittently on a mast in the harbour at Salaverry, northern Peru from 0635 until late morning.

This voyage was my best for peregrine sightings, both near and far and in daylight and at night. Peregrine Falcons are powerful flyers, can eat on the wing and will often use ships as both hunting platforms and roosting places. I have no doubt that they are easily capable of routinely crossing large stretches of water such as the Caribbean Sea.

## Gyr Falcons

The Gyr Falcons, meanwhile, were observed during voyages in four consecutive years (2013–16) from both the North Atlantic and the North Pacific oceans.

**2013:** I embarked on *Le Boreal* in Reykjavik, Iceland on 14 August, and the ship sailed to southern Greenland and up the west coast to Disko Bay before turning south for the change-over of passengers at Kangerlussuaq. The next phase took us as far north in western Greenland as Thule before

**Plate 74.** Gyr Falcon. © *C de Boer*

heading for various places on Canada's Baffin Island, thence returning to Kangerlussuaq. The final voyage left for southern Baffin Island, Labrador, the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the river itself, finishing in Quebec City on 18 September.

**22 August** - near Ilulissat, central Greenland: one brown juvenile was seen at 1250 at 65.8N, 53.4W, about five miles offshore flying low over the ship from astern before heading off in a SSE direction. Several Pomarine Skuas *Stercorcarius pomarinus* were going the same way too.

**24 August** - at sea, off west-central Greenland, 67.9N, 54.1W. At 0720 I was amazed to look down from the bridge upon an adult, black-spotted, white bird as it drifted along the side of the ship and circled the bow. Curiosity satisfied, it drifted away towards land, six miles away.

**Plate 75a–b.** Gyr Falcons. © *S Cook*

**7 September** - Coronation Fjord area, Baffin Island, 67.4N, 63.3W, three miles offshore. Five minutes after seeing a Peregrine Falcon fly past the ship I saw a dark Gyr Falcon fly across in front of us, without deviating.

During this period I also saw one Merlin *Falco colombarius*, 2 American Kestrels *Falco sparverius*, numerous peregrines and three more Gyr Falcons, all on shore. The best gyr was another white bird, which I spotted on a rock a mile away on Meteorite Island and was able to approach to within 150 metres; it was in view for two hours. Of the other two gyrs, one was stooped at by a peregrine.

**2014:** Much of the summer was spent in Spitsbergen but at the end of the season my ship, the *Ortelius*, visited eastern Greenland, with passenger change-overs in Akureyri, Iceland.

**7 September** - Sailing down the east coast of Greenland, 70.9N, 21.1E, ten miles offshore, we sighted another white-phase bird. Those of us present were astonished to see it fly slowly past us, very close, just above bridge level as it headed in a southerly direction.

**10 September** - We were sailing out of Scoresby Sund, 8 nm ESE of Cape Brewster, (70.1N, 21.7W) and watched two white birds for 22 minutes in the middle of the afternoon. The first one drifted by at very close range and circled us before flying off towards a large iceberg a mile ahead of us, and occupied by numerous Black-legged Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*. Upon our approach the falcon could be seen sitting halfway up the iceberg. It then flew up to the top where it was almost immediately joined by another one. The ship circled the berg, giving us further views, before we continued on our way.

**2015:** The *Silver Discoverer* took me from Nome, Alaska on 13 August to Taiwan on 22 September via Russia (Chukotka, Kamchatka, Kuril Islands and Sakhalin Island), Japan (including the Ryukyu Islands) and South Korea.

**26 August** - at sea, 4 nm off southern Kamchatka at 51.9N, 158.4W. From 0535–43 I watched a huge, very dark brown and very heavily streaked immature Gyr Falcon. Typically, it circled the ship at close range several times before setting off on hunting

**Plate 76.** Gyr Falcon. © *L Gwynn*

forays close by. The first two targets were small groups of Crested Auklets *Aethia cristatella* that were skimming over the calm sea. Both groups were chased with vigour but escaped by crash-diving into the water. The falcon then gained both height and speed to target a group of four Red Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius*. Realising that they were being attacked, they twisted and turned so quickly that the falcon was forced to abandon the chase and fly away.

What was almost certainly the same bird was seen at close quarters around the ship from 0908–11 at 51.6N, 157.7E; we were now 6.8 nm offshore.

That afternoon, at Atlasova Island, northern Kurils, I was lucky enough to see two recently-fledged Gyr Falcons from the ship, from my Zodiac and whilst ashore, engaging in lots of aerobatics with each other. They were in view for most of the time that we were at the island.

**2016:** Despite cruising in northern Norway, north-western Russia, Spitsbergen and eastern Greenland, I didn't see a single falcon - of any kind.

## Summary

Personal observations at sea over many years have rewarded me with many Peregrine Falcon sightings. In suitable areas Gyr Falcons too can be found and their curiosity as a predator often seems to draw them towards ships. These large, powerful and impressive birds are exciting enough at any time but to see one drifting lazily by at close range is a very special thing.

Being at sea provides unique opportunities to observe many kinds of wildlife and, if one is in the right place at the right time, a falcon is always worth looking out for. Even if the encounter is brief, it will always be memorable.

***Simon Cook***
*Email: cookbirder@hotmail.com*

# Cruise ship encounters

by M Calvert

*(Photographs by the author)*

## Lanceolated Warbler

In late October 2016 my wife and I joined the cruise liner *Emerald Princess* in Singapore for a cruise via Thailand and Bali to Fremantle, Busselton, Melbourne and Sydney. There was no employed wildlife guide on board, but by the time we left Laem Chabang, Thailand on 31 October 2016 bound for Bali I had already become well acquainted with two other serious birders, Noam Marcus from Canada and Steve Ridley from England, as we compared sightings of seabirds from the promenade deck.

On the morning of 1 November a small passerine was rescued by Noam from a café by the stern and taken to the *Sanctuary*, a quiet part of the vessel on a higher deck. Here we three identified it as a Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*, an identification that to my great relief was later confirmed by Peter Colston, a fellow RNBWS member who last year had been most helpful in explaining my mis-identification of a Lapland Bunting (see page opposite).

Our little warbler seemed quite content, often walking around a decorative area of bark where it apparently managed to feed, and was last seen on 4 November when it became more active and was believed to have flown ashore onto a small islet off Bali.

**Plate 77.** Lanceolated Warbler.

**Plate 78.** Peregrine Falcon.

## Peregrine Falcon

In mid-February 2017 my wife and I flew out to San Diego before joining the cruise ship *Maasdam* of Holland America Line for a voyage along the Pacific edge, visiting three ports in Mexico before fringing Panama prior to visiting Manta in Ecuador and finally Salaverry and Callao in Peru.

As with our earlier cruise, the ship did not provide a wildlife expert but I soon encountered Ken Miller, a keen birder from Washington state, and we two had a busy time fielding identification enquiries from fellow passengers relating to passing seabirds.

During the afternoon of 1 March I observed an immature Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* following the ship for about fifteen minutes. The bird carried prey in its talons, a dark bird which we thought was probably a species of storm-petrel. The ship's position was 11.6N, 88.8W (off the west coast of Nicaragua).

I should add that I passed the details of all my observations during these two cruises, both seabird and land birds at sea, to the RNBWS data manager, Stephen Chapman, for inclusion in the RNBWS database.

***Malcolm Calvert***
*Email: mcalvert4@ntlworld.com*

# Letter to the Editor

by M Calvert

Dear Editor,
You were kind enough to print in *Sea Swallow* 65 my account of the sighting of a Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* on board ship 500 miles south of Iceland. The good news was that the article produced a swift response from fellow RNBWS member Peter Colston. The bad news was that he told me that my Little Bunting was in fact a Lapland Bunting, and once I read his reasoning I realised that he was right.

"I am sorry to disappoint you", he wrote, "but your images are of a Lapland Bunting *Calcarius iapponicus*, and judging by the plumage and pointed tail feathers a first-winter individual. Little Bunting never shows cream traces down the mantle, has paler pinkish legs, bright chestnut ear coverts and very conspicuous white eye rings. Furthermore, your bird shows the typical reddish-brown wing panel of a Lapland - and look at its spurs!"

He went on to say, "in January 2016 I was in China where Little Buntings were common in sizeable flocks, plus Rustics, Pallas's and a few Laplands. I have also seen groups of 10–15 Lapland Buntings on board ship off Alaska. Here in Norfolk I regularly photograph Lapland Buntings whenever I get the chance so I am very familiar with both species. All the same, it would be wise to get another opinion, for I don't want to upset you on my own".

Well, I was not upset in the slightest, and indeed was very grateful to Peter, who I learned was for many years a senior curator in the Bird Section at Tring (Natural History Museum), and has been a member of RNBWS for over four decades. In short, a bit of an expert! I owe him many thanks.

Yours sincerely, Malcolm Calvert

***Malcolm Calvert, Hillbre,***
***12 Hill Drive, Handforth,***
***Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 3KR.***

**Plate 79.** Little Bunting. © *S Gantlett*

**Plate 80.** Lapland Bunting. © *M Calvert*

# Notes on seabird reports received 2017

by Captain S Chapman MN

This year's summary of reports received covers the calendar year 2016. It follows the established format and systematically notes highlights from the material received from observers at sea. It lists all observers and their voyages, and capture highlights of their sightings. It concentrates more on observations of unusual and seldom reported species; observations from areas rarely visited; large concentrations of birds; reports of evidence of migration; reports of unusual behaviour and feeding observations; and associations with cetaceans. The taxonomy follows the Revised RNBWS Checklist of Seabirds (2013), available on the RNBWS website.

This year reports received are less than in other years with stalwarts Steve Copsey and Tony Tindale on board HMS *Protector* now ashore, and Mark Cutts reporting on his last voyage at sea on board HMS *Richmond* (Cutts 2016). However, data from HMS *Protector* is now being extracted from H634 reports forms submitted to the UK Hydrographic Office. We are grateful to the ship's HM1, Lt Kate Retallick, who volunteered to keep the channels of communication open with RNBWS.

Re-assuringly, Lt Retallick reports that the hydrographers aboard keep records of bird sightings during Antarctic work periods and report these to the UKHO using form H634. Observers report date/time, position, wind speed and direction, bird name and number observed. They are asked to add general description of activities noting feeding or alighting. What is not supplied is the specific observer name, so in the analysis of reports sightings quoted will be indicated as *H634*, as source. Descriptions of behaviour are sometimes very poetic: Gentoo, two gloriously swimming near an iceberg and three taking it easy, sunbathing on the berg. I would like to see some notes, for example to support the ID of 10 Matsudaira's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma matsudairae* flying low over the water off the bow.

Whilst marine mammal observation is now mandated training for all RN OOW, seabirds do not meet the requirement and it is on-board training that generates the capability. "There is an interest among most of our HM ratings once they begin to be able to identify birds and sometimes they get quite excited about particularly large birds such as the Southern Giant Petrels which seem to be intent on performing very close fly-bys of the bridge", Lt Retallick.

## Marine Ornithology Publications

Sometimes obvious targets slip under the radar beam, such as the Pacific Seabird Group's biannual publication *Marine Ornithology*. My attention was drawn to this journal by Dr Colin Rogers' article on Seabirds of the Chatham Islands and Bollons Seamount Expedition, 2016, Seamount Expedition 2016 on page 27 which refers to observations by Robert Flood and others of the **Chatham Petrel**, *Pterodroma axillaris* at sea that confirm the presence of this species in waters off New Zealand (Flood, Wilson and Zurfelt 2016). In addition, and of special interest to RNBWS, is a sighting the **Magenta Petrel**, *Pterodroma magenta* on this expedition. The data on these species will be added to the Database. An earlier paper in the same journal records a first sight record of the Chatham Petrel in the eastern Pacific (Force *et al.* 2009) on 11 Oct 2006 at 13°10'S, 90°17'W.

An observation worth noting in Flood, 2016 is that at sea the team found that Chatham Petrel and Soft-plumaged Petrel *P. mollis* could be confused. Soft-plumaged Petrel is another compact *Pterodroma,* although it is larger. When flying low, Chatham Island Petrel can appear to have dark underwings of Soft -plumaged. Also, both are compact and have thick grey neck tabs. Confusion they advise was usually sorted out by viewing the underwings more clearly, assessing flight behaviour, establishing size, or a combination of these. Valuable ID comments but we are mindful of the difference between

the detail one can see from a small boat chumming and a naval or commercial ship.

The journal in question *Marine Ornithology* is published both in hard copy and in electronic form at www.marineornithology.org. If browsing the electronic version of the journal, papers are available in pdf. They can be captured as exact facsimile of the printed version. There is no charge for viewing or downloading papers.

In a similar vein, the Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club is now available on-line immediately from publication date. It is no longer published in hard copy. Recent seabird papers include the first record of **Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus* in the Southern Hemisphere; multiple records of a **Red-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon rubricauda* on Inaccessible Island, Tristan da Cunha; *Bulweria* petrels off the Comoros and a second **Sabine's Gull** *Xema sabini* in Brazil. Details of these and others are noted later in this paper.

Whilst commenting on papers of special interest to sea birders the latest and an excellent paper on the ageing criteria for the **Black-browed Albatross** *Thalassarche melanophris* appeared in British Birds in 2015, (Flood *et al*. 2015). Several Black-browed Albatross papers have appeared in British Birds in recent years but this one with fine illustrations by John Gale has all that is needed to age a bird at sea. It covers the basics of moult, wear, plumage and bill colour with detailed descriptions and illustrations. The ageing criteria are presented for birds up to six years old, after which the majority cannot be aged accurately.

The consummate birder and author Hadoram Shirihai reports the results of a pelagic expedition to study **Mohéli Shearwater** *Puffinus (persicus) temptator* at sea off the islands of Grande Comore, Mohéli and Anjouan, in the western Indian Ocean. He shows variation in the underwing pattern of *temptator* and describes it for the first time. Also documented are its foraging behaviour and behaviour at sea, and the first natural history data for this poorly known taxon, (Shirihai and Bretagnolle 2015a).

Tentative observations of the **Mascarene Petrel** *Pseudobulweria aterrima* have been reported previously in *Sea Swallow*, for example a possible bird off Le Port, Réunion by B and Mrs EM Watts on SS *Oriana* (Vol 49 p9) and another record of 50 at 22°S 55.8°E, Capt. PW Jackson on MV *Seki Cedar*. The birds were reportedly completely dark brown petrels about same size as Great-winged *Pterodroma macroptera* that were active close to the water; however there was possibly confusion with Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacifica* (Vol 44: 7). Shirihai *et al*, 2014 presents results from pelagic expeditions to study Mascarene Petrel of Réunion, in December 2012. At-sea identification features, flight characteristics and feeding behaviour are described, as well as comparisons with confusion taxa. The adult plumage, the least known, is described in detail. Photographs, believed to be the first of this species taken at sea, are presented. One shows a female with an egg inside her body, providing evidence of return from pre-laying exodus and adding to understanding of the breeding cycle. Thirty-three individuals were recorded during three days at sea. Nine presumed breeding burrows, at six different sites, were found on Réunion in 1997–99.

During pelagic work to study Mohéli Shearwater, in November 2014, Shirihai conservatively estimated the presence of 130 individuals of a ***Bulweria* petrel** off the Comoros, with max. 48 on 8 November, between Grande Comoro and Mohéli, at c12°01'S, 43°43'E, (Shirihai & Bretagnolle 2015b). This petrel was the fourth most abundant seabird observed, after Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* and Mohéli Shearwater. Although the Comoros *Bulweria* appeared close in size to *B. fallax*, they refrained from making a specific identification, as Shirihai considered them to be smaller than other *B. fallax* he had seen. The relative location of the Comoros, with sea surface temperatures of 25°C, also better fit *B. fallax* (known to breed on Socotra, and possibly on the Arabian mainland). They were not *B. bulwerii*, which occurs over colder, more southerly waters. The paper has first class images and descriptions of the birds which observers are urged to look out for and report if sailing in Indian Ocean waters.

The above papers are free to download from the BOC at www.boc-online.org.

## Some highlights of 2016 voyages

The value in sailing similar waters and making detailed records is that one can compare and see changes. There are many variables, not the least of which is track and weather: one must start somewhere. David Ballance sailed on MV *Boudicca* in September. This was a return voyage from Liverpool to Newfoundland including St Johns, south of Newfoundland, through the Cabot Strait and eastbound through the Strait of Belle Isle. The Atlantic crossings were well to the north of 55 degrees and on the return passage David reports unusually strong or gale force WSW winds.

In his report, David says he made two previous late summer/autumn voyages in these waters, both in container ships in 2003 and 2006, but on earlier dates, in part on a slightly more southerly track and in better weather. These produced far more birds though the three leading species were the same: Fulmar, Great Shearwater and Black-legged Kittiwake.

In the opposite hemisphere from late January to early March Simon Cook was on the MV *Ortelius*. He embarked at Ushuaia and went first to the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula before returning to Ushuaia. Thereafter he made three round-trips to the Antarctic Peninsula. The most exciting sightings were: 100,000+ Antarctic Petrels on Scotia Sea icebergs, a Buller's Albatross at Cape Horn and three Emperor Penguins from a Zodiac in the middle of the Drake Passage. The association of cetaceans and birds is well known but in these cold waters there is more of everything: 40 Humpback, four Fin and five Blue Whales with 10,000+ Antarctic Prion plus petrels, penguins and albatrosses immediately south of Drygalski Fjord, South Georgia.

To give a flavour of the experience I quote from Simon's report 185 nm SSE of Cape Horn - in the middle of the Drake Passage, on the Antarctic Convergence.

"The Drake was so calm that we decided to drop nine Zodiacs in the water and take the pax for a special boat cruise. This was the first time in over 200 crossings that I had ever done this. While I was waiting for the rest of the boats to be lowered I got further and further from the ship, which was still going ahead and further and further from my colleagues. I then heard a strange and unfamiliar call and was surprised as there were no flying birds around.

There was about a 2m swell with wavelets so I set off in the direction of the bird, which was taking me even further from the ship. It was diving repeatedly then calling and I was gradually able to get closer to it. I knew that the call wasn't a Chinstrap, the likeliest penguin in the Drake. I was intrigued. Finally, I got to see the bird better and thought it might be a shag - long body, long neck and long beak.

Then I got closer and saw that it looked a bit funny for a shag - the neck was too thick. The bird was still diving and calling and allowing me to get closer so I was finally able to get my bins on it. I was amazed to see that it was a young Emperor Penguin (see plate 81). By now I was over one mile from the ship and my colleagues. Frantic calls on my radio elicited an unbelieving response - not surprising as I am known for my sense of humour!

I was afraid that a) no-one would believe me and b) no-one else would ever see it! After a while some-one said 'take some pictures', which in the excitement, I had forgotten to do. Incredibly, the bird was now curious and swam to my boat, swam around it just below the surface and swam under it too. Even better, every single boat with pax aboard reached me and saw 'my' bird too. On the way, another driver reported another bird and, in the end, I saw three!

The first bird quickly became used to the boats and at times was only a few feet away from us. On several occasions, there were several boats around the bird at the same time. During the encounter, it continued to dive, surface and call and showed no fear or stress at all.

So, not only my first time on the Drake in 20 years in a Zodiac but one of my most unexpected and exciting discoveries ever!"

On his next voyage on MV *Plancius* off Gough Island 40S 10W a single MacGillivray's Prion was reported. The taxonomy of the prions is complicated and it remains to be determined what is a species and what is a subspecies of what. This bird is

**Plate 81a–b.** Emperor Penguin in the Drake Passage, with Simon Cook in the stern of the boat. © *S Cook*

generally thought to be a subspecies of Salvin's Prion *Pachyptila (v.) salvini*. It nests on St Paul Island (Île Saint-Paul) 39S, 77E, and 50nm SW on Amsterdam Island; 38S, 78E. Simon spotted a narrow-billed-looking bird that was photographed and shown to be MacGillivray's; others were undoubtedly seen too but not identified.

The next voyage took Simon from the Atlantic and Caribbean to WCSA. He reports winds from the north-eastern quadrant. There were also many clear, moonlit nights as well. He says that for the whole of his time on the ship (with very few exceptions!), he arose before daybreak to check the decks for seabirds/landbirds, got up again for first light and later did a 'deck check' before going to bed. "My efforts were amply rewarded and I saw a lot of birds that I would otherwise have missed!". Good advice Simon.

Speaking at a meeting of the British Ornithologists' Club in March Dr Alex Bond talked about the problems with introduced mice that are decimating seabird populations on Gough Island and what the RSPB is doing about it. Of one population 85% hatched, 17% fledged but only for a breeding success of just 15 birds.

Our thanks go to all these observers for their systematic records.

In the report that follows, observers are referred to by their initials. Dates refer to 2016 unless otherwise noted. Positions are given in degrees and decimals of degrees of latitude and longitude. Abbreviations: nm = nautical miles (1.852 km), Ad = Adult, h = hour(s), imm = immature.

**Table 1.** The data in the analysis that follows is from these voyages. Our thanks go to all these observers for their systematic records.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| David K. Ballance (DKB) | mv *Boudicca* | Liverpool to Irish and Canadian ports and return to Liverpool. September 2016. 19-page log book of census sightings and notes. |
| Malcolm Calvert (MC) | mv *Balmoral* | Newcastle, Aalesund, Spitzbergen, Trondheim, Hellesylt, Newcastle. July 2016. 5-page report. |
| | mv *Emerald Princess* | Ko Samui, Laem Chambang, Benoa, Bali, Freemantle, Busselton, Melbourne, Sydney. October–November 2016. 10-page report. |
| Stephen E Chapman (SEC) | mv *Côte D'Albâtre* | Channel crossing Dieppe–Newhaven. January 2016. 1 page report. |
| | mv *Seven Sisters* | Channel crossing Dieppe–Newhaven. March 2016. 1 page report. |
| Simon Cook (SC) | mv *Ortelius* | Ushuaia, Falkland Islands, South Georgia, Antarctic Peninsula, Ushuaia; plus three round-trips to the Antarctic Peninsula from Ushuaia. January–March 2016. 16-page report. |
| | mv *Plancius* | Ushuaia, South Georgia, Gough Island, St. Helena, Ascension I and Santiago, Cape Verde Islands (port of Praia). March–April 2016. 10-page report. |
| | mv *Ortelius* | Aberdeen, Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen. May–June. 3-page report. |
| | mv *Silver Explorer* | Tromso, Archangel, Tromso, Bear Island, Spitsbergen (and return), Greenland, Iceland. June–August. 6-page report. |
| | | St. John, New Brunswick, Philadelphia, Nassau, Cuba, (Havana and around the western end to the south coast), Cartagena, the San Blas Islands (Panama) and through the Panama Canal to the Gulf of Panama and other places in Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, boob and Chile. September–November 2016. 11-page report. |
| Lt Kate Retallick (H634) | HMS *Protector* | Salalah, Perth, Hobart, Ross Sea, Falklands, Rothera, Cape Town, Chile, Talcahuano, Antarctic Peninsula. November 2015–December 2016. 30 pages of Excel sheets |
| Colin Rogers (CR) | mv *Claymore II* | Tauranga, Chatham Island, Bollons Seamount, Bounty Islands and Akoroa. January 2016, see page 27. |

## PENGUINS *Spheniscidae*

**Emperor Penguin** *Aptenodytes forsteri* SC recorded 3 immatures from a Zodiac on 26 Feb at 59.2S, 65.2W, in the middle of the Drake Passage and on the Antarctic Convergence, 185' SSE of Cape Horn. **Adélie Penguin** *Pygoscelis adeliae* Frequent H634 reports in Antarctic waters including 2 at 77.6S, 177.7W on 31 Dec 2015 until 9 Jan 2016 with an estimated 3,000 on ice off Inexpressible Island (74.9S, 163.8E) on 3 Jan. **Magellanic Penguin** *Spheniscus magellanicus* 21 on 1 Oct at 33.5S, 52.2W and 7 on 6 Oct at 34.3S, 53.0W reported on H634.

## ALBATROSSES *Diomedeidae*

**Wandering (Snowy) Albatross** *Diomedea (ex.) exulans* In the Scotia Sea, SC noted 5 Ad and 3 imm in one hour on 26 Jan at 52.3S, 52.5W; 9/hr on 27 Jan at 53.1S, 45.6W and in the N. Drake Passage 8 in two hours on 19 Feb at 57.0S, 65.3W. **Tristan Albatross** *Diomedea (ex.) dabbenena* On passage to Gough Island SC noted 1 on 6 Apr at 43.3S, 14.5W and 4 at 42.7S, 13.6W; 9 Ad plus 4 imm on 7 Apr at 40.5S, 10.1W; 1 'superb' imm on 8 Apr at 37.3S, 12.1W; 3 on 10 Apr at 37.2S, 12.5W; 1 on 11 Apr at 34.6S, 11.5W. **Waved Albatross** *Phoebastria irrorata* First sighted on 1 Nov at 4.4S 81.5W when SC noted 3 birds with a total of 17 (4/hr). **Grey-headed Albatross** *Thalassarche chrysostoma* Approaching South Georgia on 30 Mar SC noted one at 54.0S, 38.4W then small numbers on passage towards Gough Is, and 1 Ad on 5 Apr at 45.6S, 18.4W and 2 imm on 6 Apr at 43.3S, 14.5W. **Shy Albatross** *Thalassarche (c.) cauta* MC reported at least 20 attracted to a fishing boat in the Great Australian Bight on 12 Nov (but no position data noted). **Salvin's Albatross** *Thalassarche (c.) salvini* On 9 Nov in northern Chile SC noted 1 Ad at 22.2S, 70.6W. MC reported 1 or more on passage Melbourne to Sydney on 14 Nov (but no position data noted). **(Atlantic)Yellow-nosed Albatross** *Thalassarche (ch.) chlororhychos* Approaching Gough Island SC noted two on 7 Apr at 40.5S, 10.1W; 17 (17/hr) next day at 37.3S, 12.1W; 7 (7/hr) on 10 Apr at 37.2S, 12.5W; and 3 Ad and I imm on 11 Apr at 34.6S, 11.5W and later one at 33.1S, 11.0W. **Buller's Albatross** *Thalassarche bulleri* One flying close to the ship on 11 Jan in a southerly position at 62.5S, 165.9E and 2 on 14 Jan at

47.1S, 168.8E reported by H634. SC noted a first for an Antarctic trip on 8 Feb at 55.9S, 66.6W with a small group of Black-browed Albatross. When the ship approached all the birds flew off. The Buller's was identified very quickly - black bill with lots of yellow above and below, grey head and a very obvious white forehead and broad black line around edge of white underwing. On 9 Nov in northern Chile SC noted 2 on the water at 22.0S, 70.6W. **Sooty Albatross** *Phoebetria fusca* SC had 9 (3/hr) on 4 Apr at 49.2S, 24.7W; later the same day 17 (5/hr) at 46.4S, 19.7W and 4 on11 Apr at 34.6S, 11.5W. 50+ on water around the ship on 28 Apr at 54.2S, 36.5W; and 10 on 23 Sep at 44.1S, 75.4W reported by H634. **Light-mantled (Sooty) Albatross** *Phoebetria palpebrata* One flying close to the ship on 13 Jan at 53.5S, 166.2E; and 50+ on 28 Apr at 54.2S, 36.5W reported by H634. One noted by SC on 11 Feb at 60.6S, 63.9W and 1 on 17 Feb at 56.9S, 65.0W.

### FULMARS *Fulmarinae*

**Southern Giant Petrel** *Macronectes (g.) giganteus* SC noted c40 on 25 Jan when approaching Stanley, 51.6S 57.6W. **Northern Fulmar** *Fulmarus glacialis* On 24 May SC noted 6–700 (160/hr) at 68.0N, 6.5W. Off Spitsbergen on 17 Jul MC commented on the presence of blue phase birds. On 10 Sep DKB reported counts of 5, 15 and 13/hr in vicinity of 52N, 37W; on 11 Sep counts of 10, 18 and 3/hr in vicinity of 50N, 46W; on 19 Sep, counts of 11, 33, 45 and 120/hr in the vicinity of 56.5N, 25.0W; and on 20 Sep, a total of 23 including 2 blue phase for an average count of 7/hr in the vicinity of 56.4N, 17.0W. Off watch on 11 Oct SC noted a southerly bird at 35.9N, 74.5W and another when on watch at 35.5N, 74.5W. **Antarctic Petrel** *Thalassoica antarctica* On 2 Mar SC had one of the most exciting sightings of the year with 100,000+ birds on Scotia Sea icebergs centred around 62.4S, 52.5W. The majority, if not all, were moulting their inner primaries. **Snow Petrel** *Pagodroma nivea* Five sightings for a total of 9 on 26 Dec 2015 at 68S, 173E; one on 5 Jan at 76.8S, 167.7E; 20 on 10 Jan at 67.6S, 167.5E; 3 on 16 Feb at 74.9, 173.3E; and 8 on 3 Apr at 62.0S, 57.9W reported by H634.

**Slender-billed Prion** *Pachyptila belcheri* At least 1,000 surrounding the ship on 20 Apr at 41.2S, 60.8W reported by H634. **De Filippi's Petrel** *Pterodroma defilippiana* On 9 Nov SC noted 6, most across the bow; 1 very close at 21.9S, 70.6W and 5 others. At 23.30, whilst standing by the side rail at the stern, SC was nearly hit in the face by one of these birds. South of Antfagasta SC noted 74 (18/hr) on 11 Nov at 25.5S, 70.8W. **Bulwer's Petrel** *Bulweria bulwerii* SC reported unusually southerly sightings of this dark petrel when they would be expected to be in northern hemisphere breeding areas, with one on 13 Apr at 24.9S, 8.5W; 2 on 15 Apr at 16.3S, 5.9W; and 2 on 23 Apr at 4.0S, 16.9W. More expectedly were reports of 2 on 24 Apr at 0.1N, 17.6W and 2 more at 1.3N, 18.1W; 1 on 26 Apr at 7.4N, 20.5W; and 2 on 27 Apr at 11.8N, 22.2W and 2 when approaching Praia on 28 Apr at 14.7N 23.4W. **Fea's Petrel** *Pterodroma (f.) feae* Approaching Praia on 28 Apr SC noted 5 at 14.7N 23.4W. **Great-winged Petrel** *Pterodroma (m.) macroptera.* On passage to Tristan Group SC noted 17 (17/hr) on 8 Apr at 37.3S, 12.1W and one on 11 Apr at 34.6S, 11.5W. MC reported seeing regularly 11–2 Nov and perhaps fewer 14 Nov on passage from Busselton, WA to Melbourne (but no position data supplied). **Soft-plumaged Petrel** *Pterodroma mollis* On 20 Feb SC noted 10 at 61.5S, 62.8W.

### SHEARWATERS *Procellariinae*

**White-chinned Petrel** *Procellaria aequinoctialis* On 2 Apr SC noted c300 at 54.3S, 34.6W. **Spectacled Petrel** *Procellaria conspicillata* on 11 Apr SC noted 20/hr at 34.6S, 11.5W; later 10/hr at 33.1S, 11.0W and a single bird with a pod of False Killer Whales on 13 Apr at 24.9S, 8.5W. **Sooty Shearwater** *Ardenna grisea* SC noted 5,000+ on 25 Jan when approaching Stanley, 51.6S 57.6W; a few next day in the Scotia Sea, 52.4S, 51.5W and an estimated 7,500/hr on 2 Aug off the Horn at 52.0S, 64.3W. On 12 Sep DKB reported 1 at 47.7N, 52.1W off St John's; and on 16 Sep 1 at 51.8N, 55.2W; on 17 Sep, 1 at 53.8N, 49.2W; and on 20 Sep, 3 together at 56.2N, 14.3W. Off southern Peru SC reported a concentration of c10,000 on 6 Nov at 16.2S, 74.0W. **Great Shearwater** *Ardenna gravis* SC counted 8 (6/hr) on 23 Jan at 53.6S, 63.6W; 17/hr on 26 Jan in the Scotia Sea at 52.4S, 51.4W and 1 on 2 Feb at 57.2S, 39.1W. Approaching nesting island of Gough SC noted c700 on 7 Apr at 40.5S, 10.1W. Off eastern Greenland on 6 Aug SC noted 2 in a gathering of skuas at 70.8N, 20.2W and 53 (26/hr) at 71.4N, 18.6W. DKB saw 2 on 9 Sep at 54.7N, 25.5W, and next day 22 in 4 hr at 52.6N, 36.1W; and on 13 Sep, 5 at 46.8N,

56.1W off St Pierre. On 15 Sep DKB reported 5 at 49.6N, 58.1W off Cow Head; on 17 Sep, 1 at 54.5N, 45.9W; on 18 Sep, 1 at 55.7N, 38.0W; and on 19 Sep 1 at 56.5N, 27.1W. **Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris borealis* On 11 Oct SC noted c100 feeding at 36.0N, 74.5W. On 13 Sep DKB reported 1 at 46.8N, 56.1W off St Pierre. **Cape Verde Shearwater** *Calonectris edwardsii* SC noted 1 with a Cory's on 23 Apr at 4.0S, 16.9W; 2 on 25 Apr at 3.8N, 19.1W; and 4 when approaching Praia on 28 Apr at 14.7N 23.4W. **Manx Shearwater** *Puffinus puffinus* On 24 Jun SC noted 1 on 24 Jun at 71.1N, 20.8E. On 11 Oct SC noted 3 feeding with Cory's at 36.0N, 74.5W. In stormy weather DKB saw 2 on 8 Sep at 54.7N, 14.1W; 1 next day at 54.7N, 25.5W; and on 21 Sep, a total of 6 at 55.6N, 6.0W. **Boyd's Shearwater** *Puffinus boydi* SC noted 2 when approaching Praia on 28 Apr at 14.7N 23.4W. **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis* In the Scotia Sea, SC had very close views of one on 29 Mar at 53.9S, 46.1W which was noted as the Sub-Antarctic race; also 17 on 7 Apr at 40.5S, 10.1W.

### DIVING-PETRELS *Pelecanoididae*

**(South) Georgian Diving-petrel** *Pelecanoides georgicus* Approaching South Georgia SC noted two birds of this species plus 14 unidentified Diving-petrels on 30 Mar at 53.9S, 38.4W and on 2 Apr 2 at 54.3S, 34.6W.

### STORM-PETRELS *Hydrobatidae*

**Southern Storm-petrels *Oceanitinae***

**Wilson's Storm-petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus*. On 11 Sep DKB reported a total of 16 during the day in the vicinity of 50N, 46W. **Elliot's Storm-petrel** *Oceanites gracilis* On 4 Nov SC had close views of one at 11.2S, 78.0W; 3 on 5 Nov at 13.5S, 76.3W; 6 on 6 Nov at 16.2S, 74.0W; and 7 on 9 Nov at 21.0S, 70.5W. **Grey-backed Storm-petrel** *Garrodia nereis* On 21 Jan SC had close views of 7 at a small mat of seaweed at 53.8S, 63.9W and one on 26 Jan at 52.6S, 50.1W. **Black-bellied Storm-petrel** *Fregetta tropica* In the Scotia Sea SC noted 15 (7/hr) on 27 Jan at 53.5S, 42.7W; in Drake Passage 9 (3/hr) on 6 Feb at 61.8S, 59.8W and 10 (3/hr) on 2 Apr at 54.3S, 34.6W. **White-bellied Storm-petrel** *Fregetta grallaria* On passage to Gough Island SC noted 21 (7/hr) on 5 Apr at 46.4S, 19.7W and later 50–60 (18/hr) at 45.6S, 18.4W. On passage to Tristan SC noted 32 (32/hr) on 8 Apr at 37.3S, 12.1W.

**Northern Storm-petrels *Hydrobatinae***

**European Storm-petrel** *Hydrobates pelagicus* On 14 Jul SC reports, a single bird appeared whilst watching a feeding melée of 20+ Killer Whales, at 71.1N, 20.8E. **Leach's Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* On 11 Sep DKB reported a total of 16 during the day in the vicinity of 50N, 46W. **Markham's Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma markhami* Off northern Chile SC noted 110 (30/hr) on 9 Nov at 21.0S, 70.5W. **Hornby's Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma hornbyi* On 9 Nov SC noted 2 at 21.7S, 70.6W.

### TROPICBIRDS *Phaethontidae*

**Red-billed Tropic-bird *Phaethon aethereus*** On passage to St Helena, on 13 Apr SC saw one low overhead at 24.7S, 8.4W, plus an unidentified tropic-bird a short time before. South of the Cape Verde Islands SC noted 1 on 27 Apr at 12.7N, 22.6W and 5 approaching Praia on 28 Apr at 14.7N 23.4W. On 11 Oct SC noted one off Cape Charles, sea temperature 24°C, at 37.0N, 74.6W. **Red-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon rubricauda* A single bird was photographed on 18 Feb 2015 and previously over Inaccessible Island, 37°18'S, 12°41'W. This is the first record of any tropicbird in the Tristan da Cunha group, the fourth documented Red-tailed Tropicbird for the Atlantic Ocean, but only the second beyond coastal South Africa, and represents considerable vagrancy of >5,000 km from the species' normal range (Bond *et al.* 2015).

### FRIGATEBIRDS *Fregatidae*

**Ascension Frigatebird** *Fregata aquila* On the Grattan Bank SC noted 3 on 20 Apr at 9.7S, 12.7W. **Magnificent Frigatebird** *Fregata magnificens* One on 17 Oct off western Cuba was the only seabird SC recorded at 21.4N, 83.0W, in a day's watch; on 25 Oct 56 noted in Gulf of Panama at 8.2N, 78.5W.

### GANNETS and BOOBIES *Sulidae*

**Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus* On a crossing from Newhaven to Dieppe on 23 Jan, SEC counted 95 Ad/hr at 50.1N, 1.0E; on a return voyage at 50.0N, 1.0E there were auks but no Gannets. Whilst odd observations such as these may seem to be of little value collecting data regularly even on short passages will have a story to tell. On 13 Feb an adult was identified and photographed close to the mouth of the Rio Pirangi, north east Brazil, 4.4S, 37.8W. This would appear to be

the first southern hemisphere record (Teixeira *et al.* 2016). On 26 Jun SC noted a single bird at 71.1N, 20.8E; on 14 Jul a single imm also at 71.1N, 20.8E and on 6 Aug very close views of an imm at 71.4N, 18.6W. On a boat trip on 14 Jul to Storstappen (74.1N, 25.3E) MC reported up to 1,000 pairs nesting. Near Trondheim (64N, 11E) on 20 Jul MC noted 1 adult and c800 in the North Sea on 22 Jul. DKB reported 15 Ad on 7 Sep off Malin Head, 55.3N 7.9W and 106 Ad in ¾ hr at 55.1N 8.6W. **Blue-footed Booby** *Sula nebouxii* Off Ecuador on 29 Oct SC saw 2 at 1.5S, 81.1W. On 2 Nov, SC witnessed a spectacular feeding frenzy, shortly after leaving Isla Lobos de Tierra, 6.4S, 80.9W with 10,000+ and 300+ Long-beaked Common Dolphins. 'The birds and dolphins were on a converging course (from behind) and soon surrounded the ship before moving on. Perhaps the best frenzy that I have ever seen!' **Peruvian Booby** *Sula variegata* Approaching Paracas, SC reported c25,000 on 5 Nov at 13.5S, 76.3W. **Masked Booby** *Sula dactylatra* SC noted 11 when approaching St Helena on 15 Apr at 16.3S, 5.9W and 4 Ad and 3 imm on 22 Apr at 7.5S, 14.6W. **Nazca Booby** *Sula (d.) granti* A single bird reported by SC on 1 Nov at 4.6S, 81.5W. **Brown Booby** *Sula leocogaster* SC noted 2 when approaching St Helena on 15 Apr at 16.3S, 5.9W and I on 22 Apr at 7.5S, 14.6W. **Red-footed Booby** *Sula sula* SC noted 1 on 22 Apr at 7.5S, 14.6W. Five and then c50 on 7 Nov 2015 at 6.4S, 71.0E reported by H634.

## CORMORANTS and SHAGS *Phalacrocoracidae*

**South Georgia Shag** *Leucocarbo (a.) georgianus* Approaching South Georgia on 30 Mar SC noted 37 at 54.0S, 38.4W.

## SANDPIPERS, SNIPES *Scolopacidae*

Without being certain of species on 11 Sep DKB reported 1 phalarope in flight at 50.6N, 44.7W; and on 16 Sep 18 in flight in groups and singles plus 1 with positive ID as *P. fulicarius* at 51.8N, 55.2W and 5 more uncertain near Belle Isle. Several large groups of phalaropes totalling c1,000 sighted by SC on 1 Nov at 4.4S, 81.5W and 3–4,000 in two hours later the same day at 5.0S, 81.5W. SC noted 80 on 11 Nov at 25.5S, 70.8W. **Red (Grey) Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius* On 12 Sep DKB reported 1 at St John's Harbour. **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* Off northern Peru SC noted 10 on 1 Nov at 5.0S, 81.1W.

## SHEATHBILLS *Chionidae*

**Yellow-billed Sheathbill** *Chionis albus* Three on 17 Apr at 52.0S, 58.3W and one on board later the same day reported by H634.

## SKUAS and JAEGERS *Stercorariidae*

**Great Skua** *Stercorarius skua* DKB noted 2 on 7 Sep at 55.1N, 8.6W; and on 18 Sep, 1 at 55.7N, 38.0W. **Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus* DKB saw 1 on 10 Sep at 52.3N, 37.1W and on 17 Sep, 1 at 53.8N, 49.2W. On 6 Aug SC noted 27 in a gathering of skuas at 70.8N, 20.2W, 25 nm offshore eastern Greenland. The skuas came to and around the ship before moving away. **Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus* SC noted a single Ad on 25 Apr at 4.9N, 19.5W; on 24 May total of 14 in small groups at 62.8N, 3.2W; on 28 May 1 Ad flew off ice at 78.1N. 2.6W; and on 15 Jun 15 at 68.1N, 40.2E. On 6 Aug SC noted 48 in a gathering of skuas at 70.8N, 20.2W, 25 nm offshore eastern Greenland which came to and around the ship before moving away. At anchor Pyramiden, Spitsbergen (78.7N, 16.3E) MC noted 1 Ad on 16 Jul. **Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus* On 6 Aug SC noted 9 in a gathering of skuas at 70.8N, 20.2W, 25 nm offshore eastern Greenland which came to and around the ship before moving away. DKB saw 1 on 10 Sep at 52.3N, 37.1W.

## GULLS *Laridae*

**Belcher's (Band-tailed) Gull** *Larus belcheri* on 29 Oct SC had 2 at 1.5S, 81.1W. **Glaucous Gull** *Larus hyperboreus* Leaving Jan Mayen on 26 May SC noted 3 at 71.3N, 8.4W; 5 (4 imm) on 29 May at 79.1N, 5.5W; and 3 on 7 Jul at 81.0N, 17.3E. **Grey Gull** *Leucophaeus modestus* Approaching Paracas SC noted 7 on 6 Nov at 16.2S, 74.0W and 1 Ad on 11 Nov at 25.5S, 70.8W. **Franklin's Gull** *Leucophaeus pipixcan* Evidence of the wintering population was reported by SC off northern Peru with c3,000 (1,500/hr) on 2 Nov at 5.0S, 81.15W. **Grey-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus* In northern Peru SC noted 32 on 1 Nov at 5.0S, 81.5W. **Little Gull** *Hydrocoloeus minutus* On 18 Jun 2 Ad seen by SC from the ship when sailing up the Dvina Riva towards Archangel. 1 Ad and 1 imm on 6 Sep in the Mersey Estuary, 53.5N 3.2W (MC). **Sabine's Gull** *Xema sabini* Approaching Spitsbergen on 29 May SC noted one Ad at 79.1N, 5.5E; on 24 Jul SC noted 3 adults distantly at Moffen Island, 80.0N, 14.5E; on 11 Aug 2 Ad seen from a Zodiac in Hall Bredning, part of Scoresby

Sund, 71.2N, 24.8W; on 12 Aug 1 Ad seen at 66.9N, 24.0W. Showing the value to be gained from filing bird images on 24 Aug 2013 a first summer bird was identified from an online and other images in Praia Raposa, in the municipality of Raposa, Brazil (02°24'S, 44°05'W). It is the second record for Brazil, (Lees *et al.* 2014). **Swallow-tailed Gull** *Creagrus furcatus* Off northern Peru SC noted 1 positive and 6 distant possibles on 1 Nov at 4.4S, 81.5W and one on 2 Nov at 6.7S, 80.5W. **Ivory Gull** *Pagophila eburnea* We seldom receive sightings of this northern gull so report sightings from Spitsbergen by SC in full. On 28 May SC reported 100+ Ad and 2 imm during the day in drift ice at 78.1N, 2.6W; on 1 Jul an adult flew past the ship at 79.8N, 18.1E in Hinlopen Strait; on 2 Jul 1 Ad on the beach at Ny Alesund, allowed a very close approach - approx. 79.0N, 117.E; on 7 Jul 1 Ad in ice at 81.1N, 20.1E, and 2 Ad later flew past the ship towards a bear on ice at 81N, 20.0E; on 18 Jul 2 Ad near a bear on ice 81.6N, 19.7E; on 25 Jul 1 Ad near a bear on ice at 81.5N, 19.0E and 1 later 81.5N, 18.8E was being attacked by a Pomarine Skua.

### TERNS *Sterninae*

**Inca Tern** *Larosterna inca* Approaching Paracas SC unusually reported c3,000 birds in two hours on 5 Nov at 13.5S, 76.3W. **Brown (Common) Noddy** *Anous stolidus* SC noted c200 approaching St Helena on 15 Apr at 16.3S, 5.9W. **Black Noddy** *Anous minutus* SC noted 26 approaching St Helena on 15 Apr at 16.3S, 5.9W.

### ALCIDS *Alcidae*

**Little Auk** *Alle alle* Approaching Spitsbergen on 29 May SC recorded 88 (30/hr) at 79.1N, 5.5E. On 30 Jun SC noted 56 (56/hr) at 81.1N, 17.6E; on 15 Jul 17 (17/hr) at 74.2N, 19.2E; on 18 Jul 441 (110/hr) at 81.5N, 17.7E; on 24 Jul 177 (90/hr) at 79.0N,10.2E; on 5 Aug 39 (20/hr) at 76.2, 2.1W and 122 (122/hr) at 75.3N, 5.4W; and on 6 Aug 398 (200/hr) at 71.4N, 18.6W. MC reported it was first observed at 77N and many to the south of Longyearben (78.4N, 15.6E) on 16–17 Jul. **Thick-billed Murre** *Uria lomvia* Leaving Jan Mayen on 26 May SC noted 26 (13/hr) at 71.3N, 8.4W; in drift ice 105 (105/hr) on 30 Jun at 81.1N, 17.6E and on 7 (35/hr) Jul 141 at 81.0N, 17.3E. **Atlantic Puffin** *Fratercula arctica* On 18 Sep DKB saw 5 at 55.7N, 38.0W.

## Acknowledgement

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***Stephen Chapman, Steeplefield, Marlpost Road, Horsham RH13 9BZ***
*Email: data@rnbws.org.uk*

# RNBWS Data

by Captain S Chapman MN

Last year in *Sea Swallow* 65: 94–95 I reported on the database and the work on checking the data. With a database of this size and little validation or checking in the data entry process there will always be questions on data quality, but I am of the view now that it is as good as we can get concerning our seabird records. More work needs to be done on the land bird sightings, but it is a case of one thing at a time. I am conscious that RNBWS after being in the vanguard with developing an on-line data collection and entry system and getting our data visible on-line, has now fallen behind. Other systems such as eBird and BirdTrack Global count their observers in tens of thousands and their records in millions. For example, eBird, which is a joint project of the US Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, receives more than 7.5 million bird observations every month.

In the UK, BirdTrack is a partnership of the BTO, the RSPB, Birdwatch Ireland, the Scottish and the Welsh Ornithological Societies, and looks at migration movements and distributions of birds throughout Britain and Ireland. It provides facilities for observers to store and manage their own personal records as well as to use these to support species conservation.

The idea behind BirdTrack is that if you have been out birdwatching or simply watching birds in your garden, records of the birds you have seen can be useful data. The scheme is year-round, and anyone with an interest in birds can contribute. Important results produced by BirdTrack include mapping migration (arrivals and departures) timings and monitoring of scarce birds. Very little is known about the timing of arrival and departure of winter visitors and this is just one area in which BirdTrack is providing useful information. A recent addition to BirdTrack is the ability to add records from global observations and contribute data to the European Bird Atlas.

What has this got to do with the RNBWS? In future, we might want to develop a mobile app for records of birds at sea to be uploaded in real time, or use such as are already available. The Executive Committee decided that we should share our data, and following discussions with the BTO RNBWS data will be shared on their BirdTrack site. Some data manipulation is needed to get our data recognised by their system, and it is complex and time consuming, but tests are going well.

What are the benefits? First, though our records are not numbered in millions they are often from areas that others have not visited. Secondly, the analytical tools available on BirdTrack Global enable information to be gleaned by data analysis and mapping to a higher level than we ourselves can achieve at present. Our data used by others will always be acknowledged as RNBWS as the data source. Taking this course will move RNBWS along in our journey to use technology to glean information from the efforts of our 1,163 unique observers.

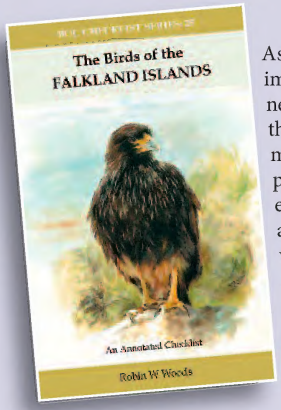
We now have RNBWS membership on BirdTrack which members can visit. Those wishing to do so can been given password access to explore the data.

A comparison of mapping with our on-line, on-screen mapping, is not yet possible but we are working to make that happen. I would like to be able to produce maps that show seasonality in seabird movements.

***Stephen Chapman***
*Email: data@rnbws.org.uk*

# Book Review

**BOC Checklist Series: 25. The Birds of the Falkland Islands; an Annotated Checklist, by Robin W Woods. 250pp. Cost £29.99. Published by the British Ornithologists' Club: www.boc-online.org**




As the back cover of this impressive book tells us, this new checklist of the birds of the Falkland Islands is the most comprehensive ever published, and will be an essential reference book for all those interested in the wildlife of the South Atlantic. It is the result of years painstaking research and observation, and a fitting tribute to Robin Woods' industry.

My own experience of Falklands birds began in 1993 when I was serving in *HMS Scylla*, where we spent a lot of time at sea and I became familiar with the pelagic species. Then in 2006/7 I had a six-month stint ashore, and together with fellow RNBWS birder Steve Copsey spent every spare minute out birding. One of the highlights of that six months was three days with Robin Woods on Middle Island, doing a full ornithological and botanical survey as part of the work for this book. (There is a very comprehensive report of that survey in *Sea Swallow* 56: 25–46). My last visit was in 2014 when I did my best to add to my tally of Falklands birds. My final total was 72 species, which I realise in the scale of things isn't that great.

Looking at the sources and contributors over the years, it is good to see several RNBWS members mentioned, notably Bill Bourne and Bill Curtis, both RFA men I might add.

The Falklands are unusual in that there have been bird records from the beginning of human occupation there. We learn that in 1771 32 species were listed, rising to 149 in 1975 (Robin Woods' first survey) to 205 in this checklist. Of these, 55 are resident breeders, six breeding summer visitors, nine possible breeders, seven former breeders, 11 non-breeding visitors, 12 transients, and 105 recorded only as vagrants. A further 54 species, many of which have been included in earlier Falklands lists, are treated here as unconfirmed because evidence of their occurrence does not measure up to current international standards. The photographs, I should say, are quite simply outstanding.

I took great delight in reading about the mis-labelled eggs of the Elegant Crested Tinamou *Eudromia elegans* in 1876, the mummified corpse of a Sick's Swift *Chaetura meredionalis* found in a shed at Moody Brook in 1959 and the tale of a Dark-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus melacoryphus* killed by a three-legged cat at Port Stanley in 2003. These were just three of many tales of avifauna misadventure but of course the pith of the book is the detail in the lists of birds, painstakingly amassed by Robin over the years.

As to the future, with just 3,000 people on an area covering 4,700 square miles and 778 islands, there must be more to learn and a new bird will no doubt be discovered soon after this book is published. No matter; I am sure this checklist will be a valuable record for years to come, and congratulations to Robin Woods for his towering achievement. Well done too to the BOC who have taken on the job of publishing the Checklist series and made a very impressive start.

***Mark Cutts***
*Email: expeditions@rnbws.org.uk*

# USEFUL ADDRESSES

## RNBWS Seabird Adviser:

Dr Russell B Wynn, National Oceanography Centre, European Way, Southampton, SO14 3ZH.
**Phone:** 0044 (0)2380596553. **Email:** rbw1@noc.ac.uk

## RNBWS Emeritus Seabird Adviser:

Dr WRP Bourne. Ardgath, Station Road, Dufftown, Aberdeen AB55 4AX.
**Phone:** 0122432349. **Email:** wrpbourne82@yahoo.co.uk

## RNBWS UK representatives:

**BRNC Dartmouth.** Dr Richard Porter. BRNC Dartmouth Devon. TQ6 0HJ.
**Phone:** 01803 837233. **Email:** rrrporter@btinternet.com

**Portsmouth Area:** Lt Cdr BF Witts OBE FRGS RN. Oakwood, Duffield Lane, Woodmancote, Emsworth, Hants PO10 8PZ. **Phone:** 01243 371497

**Portland:** Martin Cade, Portland Bird Observatory, Old Lower Light, Portland Dorset. DT5 2JT.
**Phone:** 01305 820553 (Daytime only). **Email:** obs@btinternet.com

**Humber area:** Bill Curtis, Farm Cottage, Church lane, Atwick, Driffield E Yorks YO25 8DH.
**Phone:** 01964 532477. **Email:** cwfcurtis@aol.com

## RNBWS Overseas representatives:

**Australia.** Neil Cheshire. The Loft, 7 Hodge Avenue, Encounter Bay, South Australia, Australia.
**Phone:** 61885527904. **Email:** diomedea1@bigpond.com

**Black Sea.** Gabriel Banica. Str.1 Decembrie Nr 3, B1 F17, sc Cap 49, Costanza 8700, Roumania.
**Email:** gabibiosys@yahoo.com

**Cyprus**. Colin Richardson. Petravounos 10, Marathonounta 8520, Paphos, Cyprus.
**Phone:** 003572694. **Email:** richar@cytanet.com.cy

**Falklands**. Ian Strange.The Dolphins, Snake Street, Port Stanley FIQQ 1ZZ Falkland Islands.
**Email:** furseal@horizon.co.fk

**Gibraltar**. Keith Bensusan. GONHS, PO Box 843, Gibraltar.
**Email:** bensusan@gonhs.org

**Hong Kong**. Geoff Welch. Flat 23A, Block 25, South Horizons, Ap Lei Chau, Hong Kong.
**Email:** geoffwelch46@yahoo.co.uk

**India** Praveen J. B303 Shriram Spurthi, ITPL Main Road, Brookefields, Bangalore 560037, India.
**Email:** paintedstork@gmail.com

**Madeira**. Frank Zino. Avenido do infante 26, Rez-do-chao 'C' 9000, Funchal, Madeira.
**Phone:** 00351291 763292. **Email:** fzino@netmadeira.com

**Naples** Mark Walters Via Ligorio Pirro 23 Naples 80129 Italy.
**Phone:** 0039081556446. **Email:** markwalters.naples@gmail.com

**Seychelles**. Adrian Skerrett. Hazely Brook, Keele Road, Keele, Staffs ST5 5AL.
**Phone:** 01782 751605. **Email:** askerrett@hotmail.com

**USA**. Dr Robert Wolk.6022 Bellow St, Raleigh, North Carolina 27609, USA.
**Email:** wolkidae@gmail.com

**Plate 82.** Ian Halliday releasing a ringed Lesser Whitethroat - one of the 67 birds ringed during the RNBWS week on the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth, May 2017. © *Harry Scott*